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VOL. VI.

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FOR
FAMILY, CHURCH, AND SCHOOL.

BY
JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,
Minister of the City Temple, London.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. VI

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. REGENERATED CITIES	3
II. GAMBLING	15
III. CHRIST'S ABSOLUTE LONELINESS	26
IV. IN THE VALLEY	48
V. RIVER AND SEA	58
VI. MUTUAL OVERSIGHT	67
VII. GOD AS CONSTRUCTOR	79
VIII. BY NIGHT	89
IX. WHAT CHRIST DID	99
X. "DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS"	113
XI. THE POINT OF REST	128
ILLUSTRATIVE ADDRESSES	141
PHASES OF TEXTS	156
INDEX OF TEXTS FOR THE SIX VOLUMES	225

INDEX OF TEXTS.

OLD TESTAMENT.

	PAGE		PAGE
Genesis iii. 1-15	156	Genesis xxviii. 10-22	190
— iv. 3-13	159	Exodus xii. 31	89
— ix. 8-17	164	Deuteronomy iii. 29	48
— xii. 1-9	167	Joshua iv. 23	58
— xvii. 1-9	172	— xxii. 16	67
— xviii. 17-21	194	Psalms cxlvii. 2-6	79
— xviii. 22-33	176	Isaiah ix. 2-7	218
— xxii. 1-13	181	— lxiii. 3	26
— xxv. 27-34	186		

NEW TESTAMENT.

Matthew x. 5-16	212	Luke vii. 24-35	202
— xi. 28	128	— viii. 4-15	207
— xxiii. 37	3	Galatians iii. 7-14	194
Mark xvi. 1-8	198	Ephesians ii. 1	113

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

PRAYER.

WE thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth, for thy house. We meet here as children of the living God. We are saved by faith; faith is the gift of God: Lord, increase our faith. May we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, then much faith, then full faith, then the full assurance of faith, and then, and last of all, just before heaven, the joy of faith. We thank thee for all thy love: it has been with us night and day; we have heard its song, we have felt its touch, we have responded to its appeal. Now we come to bless thee and thank thee and magnify thee with a loud noise and a great shouting and gladness of heart. We will not restrain praise before God; poor is the praise we can bring, yet thou shalt have it all; it is a poor song, not worth thy hearing if thou didst not hear us with thy love; but to thy love all our gifts are great and precious. Lord, evermore look upon us through thy love and not through thy law, through thy mercy and not through thy righteousness; for who can stand when God shall judge? All the week long thou hast been near us, nearer to us than we have been to ourselves; our downsitting, our uprising, our going out, our coming in, thou hast known. Our lives are of interest to thee. We are thine; thou didst make us, thou didst fashion us; we bear thine image, blurred and marred, but thine image still. As families we thank thee; we have had bread enough and to spare, the house is still standing, the couch invites us to sleep, and the fire calls us to warmth and comfort. The house at home is thine; so is this greater house, because the family is greater; thou dost increase thy walls according to those that wait upon thee. We are many in number; how varied we are in experience! no two of us alike, each heart has its own prayer, each soul its own offering of song. Thou knowest what sins we have done—subtle, hidden, public, criminal;

all our way is known unto the Lord. Is there an answer in the Cross ? Is there a reply on Calvary ? Teach us that thou art prepared to answer every soul, and to send all with large and tender blessings back to home and business and service. Send none unblessed away ; let every soul say, That was a message from God to me ; God meant that for my special benefit : so that in holy hymn or in read Bible or in uttered appeal and exhortation, somewhere in all the round of the service, each soul shall see the Lord and receive a blessing from his hands. We remember our loved ones who are not here, but would have been if they could ; they are on the sea, they are in the far-away land, they are in the colonies ; they are searching for health, for business, for honour, for bread : wherever they are, teach them that thou art nearer than we can ever be, and feed them with thy tender love. Be with all our sick ones. Jesus, thou knowest what it is to be sick ; thou didst in thy day heal the sick upon the earth ; they brought unto thee all manner of diseases and thou didst heal them. Heal us, Emanuel ; every man has his wound, every soul is bruised, and some whom thou lovest are sick in body, and weary and faint, and wondering when the gates will open to admit them into the home of life. Let messages of consolation and inspiration and comfort find their way to the hallowed chambers of the house, so that the whole house may be glad because of the presence of Christ. Our little children watch ; see that no east wind blights the buds ; keep the enemy from the nursery, and do thou guard and guide and strengthen and direct until out of infancy there shall stand up manhood and womanhood, strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Help us to forgive our enemies, help us to forget those who have wronged us ; if we can help them may we do so for Christ's sake and in Christ's strength. God bless the country ; God save the Queen, make her days many and her reign a reign of sunshine. God bless the greater monarch, the People ; feed them with thy truth, direct them in perplexity, and show them that even sorrow has a place in thy great ministry. And now do thou answer us with great replies, seeing that we pray at the Cross—holy, mournful, eternal, triumphant Cross ! Amen.

I.

REGENERATED CITIES.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem "—MATT. xxiii. 37.

IN the matter of drunkenness, gambling, and impurity, we have probably had sufficient denunciation, if denunciation can be sufficient upon curses so ruinous to the true interests of all classes of society. At all events, denunciation may be suspended for a moment whilst we consider whether it is not high time that we entered upon another phase of the work which it is our heart's desire to accomplish. I rise to lay before you one of the most important propositions ever made to an assembly, even in our world-renowned Guildhall. If you can be made to see the matter as I do, we ought, this very day, to begin to make history in the moral development of London. We have read of a historic rod that swallowed up all the meaner vermin that crawled around it, and I should not be surprised if the proposal now about to be made was worth more than all the schemes suggested for the unification of London, and all the hocus-pocus for taxing ground rents, and providing for the entertainment and recreation of the people. I want to organise Christian laymen for the evangelisation and the ultimate sanctification of the city of cities. If we are to have a new London, not in a superficial, but in a profound and lasting sense, the laymen of the City must band themselves together as they have never been bound before. I call for a Layman's League for the social and religious betterment of London. By a Layman's League I mean literally a League of Laymen, Christian laymen, men who believe that atheism is not essential to commercial success, and who believe that it is possible to earn honest bread even in the city of London.

In this matter Christian laymen must continue to reduce their theories to practice. We all gladly allow, and allow with deepest religious thankfulness, that there are merchants and tradesmen not a few in the city of London, who are actuated in all their commercial dealings by motives of honesty, and justice, and benevolence. In no sense would I confuse the good with the bad; but I would venture to suggest whether the good could not in some instances be even better, and so much better that the bad would slink out of sight, conscience-stricken, and afraid to show themselves amongst honest men. At this moment many persons are deeply interested in London. Politically, the management of London seems to have been undertaken, either in theory or in practice, by capable and earnest men. In company with many ministers I have been invited to take part in the observance of what is called Citizens' Sunday. My conviction, however, is that matters lie infinitely deeper than the manipulation of political and ever-changing details. My brief creed is, that the regeneration of London is its true unification. We must not tie apples on the tree, we must make the tree good enough to grow them. This is not a question of painting a complexion, it is rather a question of so renewing the blood that the health of the heart will discover itself in the health of the face. Our policy must be fundamental, or it will issue in nothing but disappointment and mortification. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." "Except the Lord build the city, their labour is but lost that build it." Christianity is nothing if not fundamental. It never daubs a wall with untempered mortar, it makes no use of painted fire. Christianity deals with the heart, the motive, the innermost springs of desire and influence. Over all the cities of the world it breathes this thrilling message,

“Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again.”

The league which I suggest must neither be clerical nor sectarian. It must be neither for old men nor young men, but for all men. It must not invidiously distinguish between men and women. It must be a league of Christian hearts, not a league of denominationalists. Neither church nor chapel must be invidiously preferred. In this matter we must be neither conformists nor non-conformists, High Church nor Low Church. We must be banded together simply as followers of Christ, zealous doers of his holy law, and determined that alike by the tenderness and power of his Cross all wickedness shall have a hard time of it in the city of London. We must have a united and consolidated testimony. Individual testimony has, happily, long been prevalent amongst us ; and, happily, sectional and denominational testimony has not been wanting ; deep and far-reaching influence has gone forth from both one and the other ; but what we now want is a solid banding together of all Christian hearts in a testimony audible, visible, beneficent, and invincible. By holy oath and solemn covenant we must give ourselves to the work of out-rooting and destroying the devil and his works. Such a league as I suggest would do immense good, by creating a vitalising moral atmosphere in the City. The very air must cast out the princedom that has ruled it so long, and men should be made to feel that the unholy fashions of centuries are displaced by honesty, simplicity, consecration, and blamelessness of life. The sects may continue all their own work in their own way, but the larger brotherhood of the Layman's League must undertake to meet the wants and solve the problems of the whole City. In joining the

league no man should be asked to what sect he belongs, or whether he belongs to any sect. In this matter there is but one denomination, the denomination of the all-redeeming Cross.

In speaking of the City I am not afraid to say that I am, in the first instance (but only as a beginning), speaking of the city of London proper, of which I may take this very Guildhall to be the typical centre. I mean the commercial city, the city by day as well as the city by night. Always remember that there are two cities—the city of day with all its busy millions, and the city of night with its reduced population, and its mists of darkness. The centre will have a powerful influence upon the circumference. The City is the centre, the circumference is the world.

The very first benefit I should expect from the formation of the Layman's League would be, I repeat, the creation of a new moral atmosphere in the City. By a subtle but profound process, the social air would become purified. Given such an atmosphere, what would be one of the first signs of improvement? One of the first signs of improvement would undoubtedly be the doing away with drinking as a basis of business. This is the curse of the City. It would appear as if in many lines of business nothing could be done without sherry, or whisky, or some kind of strong drink. I have known man after man ruined by this accursed custom. Little by little the system is poisoned, and little by little the power of the will is reduced, and the very capacity to do business is contracted, and finally destroyed. Unfortunately, upon this point I am able to bear the most direct and emphatic testimony. I am not speaking about young men as I have imagined them, but about young men as I

have actually known them in home, and business, and destitution, and death. This kind of iniquity cannot be put down by law. It can be put down, however, in due process of time, by a common sentiment of disgust. The Layman's League must lay it down as a fundamental principle, that drinking is the real enemy of business. It unbalances the imagination, it lowers the tone of conscience, it sets all relations, commercial and moral, in a false proportion and in a misleading light.

Now that I am speaking of law, I will add, that very little can be done by mere legislation. The Christian must not in this matter expect too much from political magistrate. Whatever the law may be it will drop into ineffectiveness. In fact it will drop into a dead letter, if the public sentiment, which it professedly represents, is reluctant or under-heated. Law can make little headway against public sentiment. Strange as it may appear, vital, settled sentiment is the real law of nations. The Christian Church, therefore, must address itself to the regeneration and thorough enlightenment of moral sentiment. Create in the minds of the people a horror of drinking, and you may leave legislation in that matter to take its own course. Let it be considered that any business man who makes drinking part of his commercial policy, is the victim of a vicious habit, and commercial life will at once rise to a higher and truer tone.

Take the matter of Sunday opening of museums, or picture-galleries, and the use of Sunday bands and concerts. With this aspect of civic life we are becoming more and more familiar. For my own part, I would not try to put these things down by law. Law is a poor exposition of the Gospel. I would rather a man went to a museum than to a public-house, either on Sunday

or any other day of the week. If the alternative were limited to the two points, museum or public-house, I should have no difficulty about a decision. I would thank God for any picture-gallery that would keep a man out of a public-house. If, I say, the alternative were between museums and public-houses, my watchword and my policy would be, open every picture-gallery and burn down every public-house. It would not horrify me to learn that thousands of working men visited the Guildhall gallery every Sunday, but it would force upon me many searching inquiries. As a public teacher, I am bound to acquaint myself with all the influences which affect attendance upon public worship. If you told me that the working men had left the Church and gone to the picture-gallery, I would ask myself such questions as these: Why had they done it? Why do they keep outside the Churches? Why do they prefer art to Gospel? Why do they leave me and go to the painter? Has the preacher lost his mantle, has the Church been drained of its power, has the Gospel been smothered in pedantry and professionalism? These are the questions that burn their way into my conscience. I must not call in the law to shut up every other place in order that the public may be driven into my place of ministry. I could take no pleasure in such audiences. I must plainly say to myself, I must, by the power of God, give men something better to drink than they can get in the public-house; I must, by the grace of God, eclipse all other fascinations and attractions; my church must not be filled by a terrorising magistrate. I must so express the worship of God, and so declare the Gospel of God, that no other lamps can, for a moment, even flicker in the presence of so radiant a splendour. What the law cannot do in that it is weak, the Christian Gospel must do by its music, its pathos, its

sympathy, and its unceasing beneficence. I have never signed a petition against the Sunday opening of museums or concert halls, but I have resolved, in the strength and power of God, that if men leave my Church they shall have no just reason for doing so, if the Gospel can keep them, or if practical sympathy has any adequate claim upon their gratitude.

Another grand effect of the Layman's League, if faithfully and zealously worked, would be found in the personal consistency of its members. They could not profess one thing and practise another. Public decency would cry shame upon such inconsistency. Their own outraged oath would scorch them with its inner fire. Young people employed in City warehouses would feel that their employers were their friends. A veritable millennium would set in upon the City. Our leaders would be leaders indeed. Every merchant would be a tower of strength. But if you drive men into public-houses and brothels, you may make all the laws on earth and the evil will remain untouched. Let there be a home in the centre of every warehouse. Do not compel men to wander the streets because they had no Sunday resting-place. Pour the sunshine of love upon the young life that is around you. Let every young man feel that in his employer he has a friend; let every young man work willingly and heartily for his employer in return; and let it be known throughout the length and breadth of great London, that the merchant who gives a young woman a latchkey as her salary, stands in the presence of God as a soul already damned.

My confident expectation would be that in due time the Layman's League would abolish the famous, yet infamous, jail of Newgate. Its continuance may be a necessity for

the immediate present, but Christian men should solemnly resolve that it should be taken away at the earliest practicable moment. I never pass Newgate jail without begrudging the site on which it stands. In many respects it is the finest site in central London. To me it is a horrible thought that such a piece of ground should be burdened by a prison. Newgate jail has been long enough in the City already. I want to see on that very ground the headquarters of the Layman's League in London, a great building in which the old stones shall be shaped to new uses, a huge building with its assembly hall, its free library, its picture-gallery, its museum, and its hundred springs of help, and sympathy, and practical solicitude. Newgate jail is a standing blot upon the morality of London. We take down City churches and City chapels, and leave the hateful jail in possession of its magnificent site. Sad, beyond expression, is the thought that the City church must go whilst the City jail abides. For my own part, I would not take down City churches or chapels, I would re-adapt and utilise them. I cannot bear the thought of their standing empty, especially when I remember that every one of them might be filled with interested readers, and students, and worshippers. The devil must not have the City. Take away Newgate jail, and in its place put the house of worship, the school of learning, the refuge of weakness, the well of living water, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:—"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." What a change that would make in the aspect of London! I would not cart away one stone of the jail; I would put every stone in a new place and dedicate it

to a new use. On one of the royal thoroughfares, from west to east, there would then stand a magnificent building, commodious, unsectarian, educational, which would be the glory of central London.

If any of you young men suppose that my suggestions are too romantic to be really practical, I can soon disabuse your minds of that foolish conception. Enlightened enthusiasm is always practical. It is the dynamic force which draws the train after it along the path of progress. The engine is not the train, but the train would be useless without the engine. What we want is a burning enthusiasm that may have in it even somewhat of high romance. The apostles lived a sensational life. It is no sign of high quality of character that we have allowed ourselves to drop into coolness and indifference. If you think, therefore, that my suggestions are not sufficiently practical for you, I will state them in the form of their effect rather than in their spirit as a cause. Nothing is practically right that is metaphysically wrong. If the wall is out of plumb it must eventually come down ; so I contend that if our reforms are not religious and spiritual, all our programme-making is but an increase of fuel for the devouring flame. Let me show you how my proposals would come out in personal and definite action.

I would make it discreditable for any young man either to smoke or drink before he is forty years of age. Is that sufficiently practical so far as it goes?

I would make it discreditable for any young man to wear a coat for which he had not honestly paid. Is that sufficiently practical?

I would make it discreditable for any young man to

be in bed after eight o'clock on a Sunday morning. Is that sufficiently practical? I would make it discreditable for any man to receive payment for laziness instead of for industry. I would make it discreditable for any man to play the thief by withholding honest service for which he is receiving compensation. I would make it discreditable for any man to scamp his work in any department of service. I would make it discreditable for any man to take two hours over a piece of work which he could comfortably do in one. I would make it a crime of crimes that one man should sponge upon another for a livelihood when he is able to earn a livelihood for himself. Is that sufficiently practical?

If I did not find these effects following the proclamation of my doctrines, I should certainly inquire into the moral quality of these doctrines themselves. A true gospel always ends in noble conduct. The Beatitudes are always preceded by the Commandments. Christianity is not a new species of indolence; it is an inspiration, a reconstruction, a revolution; it is nothing less than the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon the earth. I think, therefore, you will now see that in suspecting my proposals of impracticableness you have entirely misunderstood my purpose. I do not begin by unifying London; I begin by seeking its regeneration. I would, by the blessing of God, have such a London that sporting, gambling, indecent and corrupting literature could not live for a day within its walls. All the great breweries I would turn into training-schools, polytechnics, and Salvation Army barracks, and men should be made to feel that what they suspect as romance was in very deed the power of God.

No! there is no romance in this idea of a Layman's

League for the regeneration of London. It may be romantic for a merchant to be secretly falsifying his accounts and yet to take his unchallenged seat in the society of honest men. That may be romantic! It may be romantic for a man to be professing Christianity at the very moment when he is afraid to go over his own doorstep lest a hidden outrage, unsuspected by his friends, should cry shame upon him, and thus make "night hideous." That may be romantic! It may be romantic to be paying blackmail lest a man's own children should disavow and despise him. It may be romantic to be throwing financial sops to the cruel wolf of just accusation. It may be romantic to break the holiest vows, and trample under foot the sweetest memories of young love. It may be romantic first to defile the wedding-ring, and then to throw it into the devil's crucible. All this, I say, may be romantic, but it can never be other than the highest reason to seek the regeneration of London and the salvation of the world.

I plead, then, for a regenerated London: not a white-washed and bedizened London, but for a City cleansed and glorified by the very Spirit of the Lord. The reformation should be religious, not external, if it is to be lasting. Then shall the night be as the day; then innocence in man or woman may walk abroad without fear, for the sorceress has returned to her virginity, and the temptress has begun to pray. Then there shall be no birds of prey waiting to swoop down upon youth and beauty, for the whole air shall become as a breeze from the very hills of heaven. This is not to be done by law. This is not to be done by fear. The magistrate must be taught that his is a very limited function, and his technical authority must be overborne by the only

sovereignty which can successfully handle the evolution and the final destiny of man. The reformation, or regeneration, for which I pray is in very deed a miracle of grace. We hear a great clamour about "the fight for London." It is but a noise, if it mean less than that London must be won for Christ. When the Sermon on the Mount is the charter of London, the City may be considered as inviolably safe. When the Cross of Christ is the true crest of London, no plague shall come nigh her dwellings. I am willing to bear the sneer of the investment-monger, and the social anarchist, when I say that I would make religious character the first qualification for a seat in the London County Council. I would have no man in the City Council Chamber who did not prefer conscience to ill-gotten wealth. No man should be Lord Mayor of London who made an investment of his honours, or betrayed the unsuspecting into spending their money for that which is not bread. Again and again I insist that no reform is worth having that is not fundamental. Gravitation can never be displaced by mechanics. This is the burden of my speech ; it is the chorus which is meant to follow every paragraph. I call upon the laymen of London to adopt this spiritual programme, and to cast out every other proposal as superficial and inadequate. We shall be mocked as fanatics, we shall be laughed at as bigots, the public-house and the brothel will be against us, some sections of the Stock Exchange will hold us up to ridicule ; but, as all things must be proved by the final result, I commit my proposals to the judgment of good men, and to the arbitrament of impartial time.

II.

GAMBLING.

[This address was delivered in Exeter Hall, London, on November 29th, 1897.]

AS to gambling, what defence can be set up for that cancer-crime? Gambling is absolutely without any defence that can stand the test of criticism. The gambler himself cannot honestly defend his baneful practice. If any respect is due to the authority of the greatest men in the world, we ought now to combine to put down the infamous crime of gambling. The greatest Italian statesman, Cavour, has condemned it; the greatest Spanish statesman, Castelar, has condemned it; the greatest English lawyer, Blackstone, has condemned it; one of the greatest English poets, Dryden, has condemned it, saying:

"Bets at first were fool-traps, where the wise,
Like spiders, lay in ambush for the flies."

No good man has ever spoken a single word in praise of gambling. Is it not a pity for young men to espouse any cause for which no honest defence can be set up? Goodness has a defence, evil has none. Sobriety has a defence, drunkenness has none. Honest money-making has a defence, gambling has none. By the very ordination of divine Providence, gambling ruins both the winner and the loser. The winner has no real comfort in his

wealth. In an hour of excitement he may feign to be happy, but at the heart of his gladness there is a serpent he cannot strangle. The winner to-day may be the loser to-morrow. The nervous excitement is followed by an inevitable and tremendous reaction. What does the voice of Wisdom say? The plea is very subtle, and ought to be very persuasive. The voice of Wisdom says, "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul." The man is actually devouring himself. Every bad thought degrades the quality of the brain. Every evil passion leaves a man poorer than it found him. In gaining money he is losing his manhood. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" These are the searching appeals of the Christian religion: they bring the very voice of God into the court and sanctuary of the human soul. Let every young man write it in the very centre of his heart, that to sin against Wisdom is not only to sin against God, but is, actually, to drive the soul itself into destitution and ruin. This applies to all the forms of vice which we have specifically to denounce, and certainly it does not apply least to the growing crime of gambling.

I know I approach perilous ground in my next observation, but at the risk of driving away a full half of those who attend to me, I will not hesitate to speak frankly. I cannot restrain myself from pointing out that there is a gambling which hides its hideous features under the less offensive description of speculation. In my judgment the truly wise man, the man of statesmanlike mind, will keep speculation at a safe distance. Betting may be denounced as vulgar, and altogether fit only for the gutter and the circus, carpeted with sawdust and orange peel; whereas speculation may be described by

its votaries, its victims in reality, as an exercise approaching the dignity of a fine art. It is falsely supposed to be the genius of commerce. An unbridled fancy would not hesitate to describe speculation as the very poetry of business. Many commercial Miltons fancy they are born to cultivate this Paradise Regained. Away with all such fantastic and mischievous nonsense! The Stock Exchange is the bottomless pit of London. Perhaps you will suppose that I am dealing with all Stock Exchange transactions in one sweeping condemnation, but I am doing nothing of the kind. Sweeping condemnation often defeats its own objects. There are men on the Stock Exchange, in every city of the empire, who do their business honestly and to the satisfaction of all parties concerned in their transactions. There are Christian stockbrokers; men who are not afraid either of Christian profession or of Christian service. I make this admission in the broadest spirit of justice and generosity. But that does not prevent my repeating that the Stock Exchange is the bottomless pit of London. It is worse than useless for men of business to warn young men against gambling if they are gambling themselves. Thou that preachest "Do not steal," dost thou steal? Thou that preachest "Do not gamble," dost thou thyself gamble? Do not cover up gambling under the gaudy dress of speculation, and do not condemn as gambling what you are in very deed doing under a less repulsive description. I do not know a more dangerous counsellor for young men than the man who advises them not to go to excess, under the plea that the thing itself may be right, but it may be driven into criminal exaggeration. In my judgment it is not the degree of gambling which is bad, but the thing itself, in its root and branch, and twig and leaf,—a upas tree charged with poison and death. To

gamble at all is to go to excess. Do you warn young men in your commercial offices not to go to excess in robbery? Would you permit a clerk to steal a pound out of your safe, but punish him if he took a guinea? There is no moderation in theft. There is no permissible point along the deep black line of burglary. To steal a penny is to steal the Bank of England. Not the quantity of the deed, but the quality of the deed determines its turpitude. Do any of you men of business say to your young men, "You must be very careful not to go to excess in lying?" You smile at the very suggestion. Take care, therefore, lest you wink at the young man who lies for you, because, I warn you that the man who lies for you to-day, will lie to you to-morrow. There are no white lies. There are no pardonable lies. Under all circumstances lying is absolutely forbidden. I apply the same rule to gambling: up and down, through and through, in and out, it is one of the subtlest and mightiest seductions of the devil.

Yes! It is a mighty seduction,—a temptation almost irresistible. The tempter says to a young man, Why toil for a pound or two a week when by one stroke of luck you might, as a gambler, make a thousand pounds? Why walk to your destination when you can fly to it? The young man sees how men of good business standing can make a thousand pounds in an hour, whilst he himself probably makes less than a pound a week. Such a young man is in a condition to receive temptation. What are the great fallacies upon which that young man is proceeding? First of all, he is proceeding upon a false estimate of money. It is after all very little that money can do. There is a poverty that is wealth, and there is a wealth that is poverty. "The love of money is the root

of all evil." Like the horseleech, its cry is, "Give, Give." In the next place the young man is proceeding upon the fallacy that chance is good security. He forgets that he who wins to-day may lose to-morrow. There is no solidity in his way of money-getting. He is the victim of fickle fortune. To-day he laughs merrily over his gains; to-morrow he is driven to madness by his losses. Who will accept a security so rotten and so mocking? The third grand mistake which the young gambler makes, or is tempted to make, is that labour is degrading. This fallacy, indeed, lies at the very root of many economical theories of life. I hold that degradation lies not in labour, but in idleness. The man who wishes to gain something without giving something in return is a thief, and not to be trusted in any honourable society. I travelled for several days with one of the greatest gamblers in the world. So far as I had opportunity of watching his conduct, he was a model of good behaviour. He did not drink and smoke all day, like other gamblers; he never smoked and he never touched a glass of intoxicating drinks, nor did I ever hear one unworthy word proceed from his lips. Here, then, we have a kind of model gambler to deal with, and I will show you how I treat such a case. It is a mistake to suppose that all gamblers are self-indulgent and reckless in morals. Here is a man whose gambling seemed to be the only objectionable feature in his life. Before leaving London he attended my church, and at the close of the service he told me that he had won £40,000 during the Derby week. He was, of course, buoyant, and, after his own manner, he was thankful. But what did he leave behind in this country? Did he leave any *quid pro quo*? So far as compensation is concerned, did he not practically put his hand into other people's purses and abstract £40,000?

To make £40,000, or forty thousand pence, without giving anything in return, cannot be described as having any honest relation to honest business. Whilst this particular gambler took £40,000 out of the country, it must not be forgotten that other gamblers lost £40,000 by the transaction. I charge gambling with making an illegitimate living, and as going against the first principles of lawful and honourable commerce. The merchantman gives goods for his money, the painter gives pictures, the author gives books, and the commonest artisan gives a return for his wages; but the gambler gives nothing, and lures the mind away from honest industry and healthy success. The conception of gambling has only to pervade the whole commercial mind of the country, and business itself would be paralysed, or would be turned into a great gambling transaction.

If speculation was a thorny subject, I now come to a subject infinitely more delicate; but as we are gathered in a spirit of earnestness we need not shrink from plain speaking. There is a kind of company promotion which is strictly honourable. I have nothing whatever to say against private companies whose proceedings will bear the light of day; but there is also a company promotion that is doing deadly mischief, not only in all commercial, but in all moral directions. There are companies with which it is an honour to be connected, and they, of course, are exempted from all criticism. But are there not other companies which are neither more nor less than organised, if not legalised, swindles? The companies I allude to are snares and traps by which clergymen, ministers, widows, and retired professional men of every class, are caught and victimised. Some companies are one thing on paper and another in action. Men join them in the hope that

they may sell out their stock at a premium. Other men join them as directors for a time, and when they can see their way to a profit they retire, and shake off all responsibility. But their names are decoys. If their names had not been on the prospectus many thrifty and trustful people would not have taken shares. The simple-minded people to whom I refer put their confidence in well-known names, such as the names of Lord Mayors, Members of Parliament, bankers, and chairmen of other companies supposed to be prosperous. No honest man can give his name as a bribe or decoy. His doing so is a species of the very worst gambling. He ought to be denounced as a gambler, a swindler, a daylight burglar. It is the blackest blasphemy for a professed Christian to be selling his name, or his honour, for thirty pieces of silver, and then to sit down at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or sing the sweet hymns of Christian piety. Out upon all such hypocrisy! Preachers should denounce it with no uncertain sound. It is better to empty the pews of such intruders than to allow their infamy to go unrecognised and unbranded. I would venture to say that preachers had better live on starvation salaries than on the support of men who pay them out of the proceedings of the most cruel iniquity. The Liberator Building Society did more harm to the cause of Christianity than was ever done by all the infidels in the world. No prison was ever built strong enough, or dark enough, for the confinement and punishment of men who have betrayed the trust of honest souls, or brought to ruin families devoted to virtue, thrift, and the good of the world. And Paul, standing on the steps of his own cathedral, himself unspeakably grander than the sacred pile, exclaimed in a loud voice, Ye men of London, I perceive that with all your sagacity you may be putting money into bags with

holes in them, for as I passed by I beheld a shrine with this inscription:—

THE LIBERATOR:

Houses founded on the Sand.

And I beheld old men whose work was done, young people in view of the wedding-day, working men addicted to sobriety and thrift, hastening to entrust their savings to men who wore the Christian livery. In old time I preached of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, until wicked men trembled because the pains of hell gat hold upon them; and were I to return permanently to the ministries of earth I should take up the same grand themes, and at the risk of making some men's Sunday afternoons intolerably unpleasant, I would cry aloud and spare not: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil; learn to do well; relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?

And the great voice ceased, and men cried mightily to God for the return of apostolic preaching, and men who had been guilty of bringing robbery for burnt offering hung their heads in humiliation and shame.

Many persons have attempted to patch up the case of a certain species of gambling. The racecourse has had its poor defenders. Such defenders have said, in effect, "Racing is a good thing in itself, and quite harmless if it could only be purified from all its gambling and other immoral associations." A poor plea is this, and an argument without any pretence to the support of fact or

reason. Racing and betting go together like lock and key, like length and breadth, like substance and shadow. It would seem from a long course of history that it is simply impossible to separate them. I believe it would be possible to prove that a tiger is a perfectly harmless beast when its teeth are drawn, when its four feet are amputated, and when a bullet has passed through the centre of its head. It is no use conjuring up ideal races or ideal tigers; we have simply to deal with facts as we find them, and from beginning to end in this unholy case the facts reek with every degree and variety of noisomeness. I believe that strong drink would be perfectly harmless if the alcohol could be taken out of it and thrown into the gutter. But then it would no longer be strong drink! So it is with the racecourse. Those who frequent it are, in an overwhelming majority of instances, men who go to the races not to see the horses, but to bet on their prospects. My heart's desire and prayer to God is that men who are in high places will renounce the racecourse because of the associations which are inextricably mixed up with its whole history and purpose. Woe to any country wherein heirs to the throne, Prime Ministers, and leading merchants favour the racecourse as it exists amongst us to-day! If princes are guilty, it is poor consolation to us to rebuke peasants or paupers. If a Premier can blaspheme, he has no right to rebuke the ribaldry of the streets. As Premier of England, I would rather have a man of solid character than a brilliant mind addicted to habits that may have the effect of a pestilence upon the rising generation.

In a small book I have recently published, I have poured out my heart over the sins and sorrows of London, and with that plaint I will sit down, asking my young

friends to give earnest heed to the remarks I have submitted to their attention :—

O London, thou that sinnest above all the cities of the world, God will judge thee, and in a furnace heated seven-fold will he burn thy corruptions ! Thou art full of blood. Thine iniquities darken the sky of summer, and thy blasphemies do shame the spotless heavens. Thy morning drunkenness and thy twilight lust make the dawn and the gloaming afraid, for they remember the fate of Sodom, and the stench of the brimstone that glutted Gomorrah. O London, metropolis of the world, city of millions that have spurned the Christ, thy hidden places are the habitations of cruelty, thy warehouses are established on bogs of deceit, and thy merchantmen are trained and perfected in the burglary of gambling. London ! city of renown, city of infamy, the curse of God shall come suddenly upon thee, and his lightning shall lay thy palaces in the dust, for thine iniquity standeth up as a heap, and thy shame burneth as an oven. Hast thou not spread a velvet covering over adultery, and offered a bribe to seal the tongue of accusation ? In many a garret and many a cellar are there not cruel men who beat womanhood with fists of iron, and doom little children to starvation ? Wilt thou not cast them out of the midst of thee and lay on them the stripes of a just laceration ? Are not thy churches the meeting-places of hypocrisy, where knaves take up the language of saints and false men speak the testimony of outraged and protesting truth ? I am against thee, saith the Lord, thy wickedness is not to be borne, thy sin must be consumed with fire. Yet is mine heart turned towards thee, saith the Lord, for I remember that even in this city are ten men who save it, ten houses that hold back the fire of my wrath. I

remember thy honest men, and forbear. I hear the voice of prayer, and hold mine hand. Oh that thou wouldst turn unto the Lord with steadfastness of heart, for then would I increase thy greatness and cause thine enemies to flee away. Close thy drunkeries, abolish thy brothels, burn down thy gambling-houses, and I will have mercy upon thee, yea, I will abundantly pardon. O London, London, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and thou wouldst not! Many a promise hast thou made thy Lord, but thy vows lie broken and violated on the very steps of his throne. I call thee to repentance, for the time shortens and perdition moves towards thee with fatal steps. O my people, saith the Lord, bestir yourselves, take hold upon the Altar mightily and give yourselves no rest until London shall cry unto me for pity, and humble itself at the foot of my Cross.

III.

CHRIST'S ABSOLUTE LONELINESS.

"I have trodden the winepress alone."—ISA. lxiii. 3.

IT is not uncommon for religious teachers to appeal to compassion while dwelling upon the trial and condemnation of Jesus Christ. Whether such appeal does not, in one of its aspects at least, proceed upon a moral misconception, is a legitimate and practical inquiry. Let the circumstances in which Jesus Christ was placed be regarded as circumstances which might, by a stretch of possibility, have arisen out of a merely fanatical state of mind on his own part. When this extrusion of the divine element has been mentally completed,—and by so much the reader has placed himself, not only morally, but chronologically, by the side of those who condemned Jesus Christ,—we have to inquire whether it is probable that the high priest, scribes, elders, and common citizens, could one and all have been utterly mistaken in their judgment of an ambitious fanatic? Here is a young man whose social antecedents are well known. He has spent two or three years in a strange sort of public life, uttering startling words about God, society, truth, and futurity. Those words have been accompanied by extraordinary deeds, nearly all of which have been re-constructive, and therefore so far indicative of a gentle and gracious spirit. A few very common people have been gathered around

him under the name of his disciples ; but so far as appearances go, there is no probability that he will ever secure the confidence of the educated and influential classes ; and as he condemns everything like political organisation or physical display on behalf of his claims, the established powers have nothing to fear from his work. That such a man should be brought to trial at all may excite surprise ; the fact, however, that when he is brought to judgment he is unanimously condemned to death by the leaders of the most religious nation in the world, is at least presumptive evidence that he, still viewed simply as a mere enthusiast, was wrong, and his judges were right. If his condemnation had been limited to a party, the case would have been quite explicable upon common grounds. If the multitude had condemned him, he would have been the victim of a vulgar conspiracy ; if the priests had condemned him, he would have been sacrificed to sacerdotal intolerance ; if the Roman power had condemned him, he would have been overborne by a foreign despotism, and patriotic Jews would have seen in his case all the degradation and ignominy of their own vassalage. The evidence shows, however, that even his own "disciples forsook him and fled," and that not one person opposed the sentence as a misinterpretation of Mosaic law, or as involving an outrage of Jewish institutions. Upon the assumption that Jesus Christ was a political adventurer or a religious fanatic, it is surely not too much to suppose that the authorised expositors of the law were able to estimate correctly the value of the evidence, and to pronounce with scholarly calmness and judicial impartiality the conclusion to which that evidence pointed. The question really before the judges was not a political one, or if the political side was unduly urged, we may infer how little there was in it to excite apprehension

when Pilate himself, as the interpreter and administrator of the civil law, pronounced Jesus Christ a "just person." Pilate thrice inquired, "What evil hath he done?" and showed by his hesitation that, at least so far as the Roman law was concerned, he saw no case against Jesus Christ. "And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him; no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him" (Luke xxiii. 13-15). This evidence from the highest authorities at once annihilates the charge of political treason, and throws the mind back upon Jesus Christ's attitude in relation to the religious laws and institutions of his country.

A great difficulty, on the assumption that Jesus Christ was a mere enthusiast honestly bent upon doing good, is his entire desertion by the persons who had accompanied him throughout the most of his ministry. Even if they remained secretly attached to him, it is remarkable that not one of them should have openly defended his cause; and this is the more surprising as he himself had distinctly told them what was impending, and received from them the clearest assurances of constancy. The conversation is most striking: "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad; but after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the

cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples." It should be specially noted that all the disciples were distinctly told what was about to take place, and that without exception, though they were assured that the crisis was imminent, they declared themselves ready to go with their Master even to death. The time of suffering was not remote, it was actually this night ; so that there was no time for courage to fail, supposing the case to have been one which appealed to courage merely as such. The disciples cannot, of course, be classed with those who took an active part in condemning Jesus Christ to crucifixion, yet in the face of their own declaration of intense attachment, they abandoned their Master in the crisis of his difficulties. It is true that Jesus Christ, as he was led away to be crucified, was followed by "a great company of people and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him," but it is also true that at that time "the bitterness of death" was past, and there remained only the very lowest form of suffering, the suffering of the body. Viewed morally there can be little doubt that the kiss of betrayal was more painful than the tortures of crucifixion ; the former had a direct bearing upon the soul, the latter an effect upon the flesh only. What, therefore, is certain, according to the evidence, is that at the critical point—a point hardly measurable by time, yet of the profoundest moral significance—Jesus Christ was left absolutely alone ; the people, generally, execrated his name ; the highest classes were filled with indignation against him ; his own disciples forsook him and fled ; the first follower whom he had called was cursing and swearing, and denying that he knew the man ; even his own mother is standing in the darkness as if a great shock had suddenly separated her from her Son.

There was then one point of absolute loneliness, and with that point our inquiry is concerned. On the assumption that Jesus Christ was merely an honest and earnest man, even though highly fanatical in one or two of his notions, is it probable (we do not say possible) that he would be left entirely without disciple or friend, without even his own mother, in the most critical moment of his life? Is it probable that the most intimate knowledge, the most tender regard, and the most fervent declarations of constancy, would, all at once, be disregarded or forgotten as if they had never had an existence? The question appeals to the common instincts of human nature, and if it can be answered in the affirmative we may see how insecure are the most sacred relationships of men. The inquiry is put on the distinct assumption that Jesus Christ was merely a benevolent enthusiast, who had lived an honest and useful life in the presence of all classes of his countrymen. It may give more sharpness of application to the question if we put it to ourselves in this practical shape: I have received the highest advantage from a given man; he has ministered alike to the body and the soul; having seen his life, I know it to have been pure and sound; I have told him that death itself shall not separate me from him; is it probable that within a few minutes I can abandon him as though he had done me an injury, or deny him with oaths and cursing? The question is not, whether something may not arise in the future to shake trust, but whether, having heard a distinct prediction of all that was impending, and having pledged life itself in proof of constancy, a man can, within a few hours, falsify himself in every particular? Of course he can do so if he is a hypocrite, but there is no evidence that Jesus Christ's eleven disciples were chargeable with hypocrisy. Jesus Christ did not scruple to denominate Judas Iscariot a

devil, but he never questioned the sincerity of the other disciples. On the supposition that all the disciples were hypocrites, their abandonment of their Master is easily accounted for ; but the case which on one side doubles the difficulty may even raise an impossibility on the other, for Jesus Christ would not after his resurrection have characterised a body of hypocrites as "my disciples." It is clear, then, that the disciples must be regarded as sincere men, nor must the sincerity of the women be denied ; still, there was a point of absolute loneliness in the history of Jesus Christ which is the more remarkable as immediately before it there was a pledge of love and immediately after it there were signs of returning constancy, and one or two noted men, even, were not ashamed to beg the body of Jesus. How is it to be explained that strong men and loving women could have faltered even for an instant, or, having faltered, could recover their steadfastness and yet more positively than ever avow their discipleship ?

It is remarkable simply as a fact ; and yet more so as hinting at a solution of the difficulty that Jesus Christ himself never reproached the disciples for their momentary separation from him. When he predicted the desertion he did not condemn it ; when he rejoined the disciples he did not allude to it ; even when he conversed with Peter he spoke as if more intent upon laying down the law of service than upon conducting a personal impeachment. Had the desertion been an intermission of constancy in the ordinary sense of the terms, it would have been an unaccountable oversight on the part of Jesus Christ not to have referred to it, and made it the ground of very urgent admonition ; on the other hand, not only is no allusion made to it but the disciples are addressed as if their attachment had never been impaired, and the most

arduous commission is entrusted to them as if they had displayed a strength beyond exhaustion and a courage superior to danger.

It is quite common, as we have said, to address an appeal to the natural sensibilities on the ground that Jesus Christ was cruelly treated. It has been stated that it is possible for such an appeal to proceed on a moral misconception ; it may be added, that apart from a moral misconception, the appeal is inadmissible. Of course, the merely incidental barbarity shocks the common feelings of the world—such barbarity, for example, as the soldiers perpetrated when they put a crown of thorns on Jesus Christ's head, and spat on him, and smote him with their hands, and mocked him as King of the Jews. All this may be set aside as the wanton brutality of excited men. The real suffering of Jesus Christ lay far beyond such outrage ; and, much as we may pity it or condemn the men who inflicted it, we must, before our own heart can know the agonies of contrition, feel that we ourselves would, under the same circumstances, have done precisely as the tormentors of Jesus Christ did, and must further feel that our moral constitution revolts as desperately from Jesus Christ's claims to be our personal Saviour as did the moral constitution of those who, by wicked hands, put him to the death of the cross. By a skill which is rather adroit than profound, modern criticism reflects upon the Jews who crucified Jesus Christ as if they had incurred a guilt which is entirely their own, as if they had committed the most atrocious of murders, and brought eternal infamy on their name ; whereas, it is true, in the deepest sense, that every man crucifies Jesus Christ before accepting him ; that man the genus, not man the individual, is responsible for the crucifixion, so that, though the merely

bodily suffering was not caused by our hands, the great sorrows which overbore, and finally burst the heart of Jesus Christ, were occasioned by human sin.

This anticipates the solution of the inquiry,—How is the period of Jesus Christ's absolute loneliness to be accounted for? We have so far purposely excluded the hypothesis of His divinity, and fixed the mind closely upon the line of evidence as affecting a man who has, in connection with many beautiful words and many wonderful deeds, associated a good deal of fanaticism. Up to the very night of his condemnation his disciples assured him of their most devoted veneration and love, yet almost as soon as the assurance was given, they "all forsook him and fled." The wise Speaker, the great Worker, the gentle Friend, was not only condemned by the leaders of religion and by the culture and influence of his time, but forsaken by those who for years had been his followers and beneficiaries. Is this explicable upon the theory of Jesus Christ's simple humanity? Assuming it to be partially explicable upon that theory, is there any other theory which more satisfactorily meets the difficulty? Allowing it to come very narrowly within the limits of possibility, was such a desertion necessary in the case of a merely deluded visionary? Instead, however, of regarding the history of Jesus Christ merely as a remarkable variation of common life, let it now be assumed that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of men—the foretold Redeemer who was to be wounded for the transgressions of the whole world. Instantly the evidence becomes susceptible of a deeper interpretation than if it had related only to a common case in Jewish or Roman jurisprudence. By so much as Jesus Christ had a redemptive work to accomplish—a work which included the destinies of all men—it was a necessity

that there should be a point of utter loneliness in his history. If even one man had remained by his side throughout the whole process, the universality of Jesus Christ's work would have been impaired. It was necessary that human nature as such, apart from nationality or any other accident, should show itself. Jesus Christ must stand alone, not the victim of Jewish spite or a maladministration of the law (both points being, indeed, involved on the principle that the greater includes the less), but as "separate from sinners," as having something in him which fallen human nature, even under its best conditions, was morally unable to understand. If his condemnation to death was a simple miscarriage of justice, which a keener legal acumen might have obviated, then the crucifixion only illustrates the imperfection of human institutions ; if his abandonment by his disciples was the natural result of momentary terror, which was followed by almost instant self-recovery, then their failure merely shows the fickleness of the most assured friendship ; and this interpretation leaves the work of Jesus Christ among the sensational stories of ill-conceived ambition or misdirected fanaticism, without a hint of its redemptive purpose. As to the interpretation of the letter of the law, it would be idle to doubt the ability of the court. Two thieves had been tried, one of whom pronounced their condemnation just, and, viewing the case as a common malefactor might be supposed to view it, added, "This man hath done nothing amiss." He could not enter into arguments as to the nature of blasphemy, he looked only at the overt act, and judged the case as one who knew nothing of the possible crime of doctrine. The case is significant. It shows the possibility of being right in detail and wrong in principle ; and the consequent possibility of awarding justice to a thief and withholding it from God. As a

mere question of legal interpretation, is it probable that judges who, by the witness of the condemned men themselves, had acted justly in two cases would act unjustly in the third? If it be suggested that "at the last came two false witnesses," and that upon their evidence the authorities took action, it will be found that the latter position is questionable as a matter of fact; and that even if the false witnesses did make out a plea of blasphemy, the high priest grounded his action not upon their words, but upon Christ's own. "The high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy." There is no political element in the alleged offence; in the eye of the civil law "this man hath done nothing amiss"; yet by the interpreters of another law he was pronounced "guilty of death" (Matt. xxvi. 66). Could the most religious nation in the world, God's own chosen nation, be in error in construing the law of blasphemy; and could God himself be angry with his ancient people for zealously guarding the holiness of his own Name? They were religious; they maintained the literal law; whatever they did was done in the name of God; how, then, judged by commonly acknowledged standards, are they to be considered as in error?

Keeping in view the assumption that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of the world, and consequently that his work related not to any one set of human conditions, but to

human nature apart from all accidents, how are all the facts of his trial and condemnation to be accounted for, except on the theory that these facts represent the extreme point of human apostasy?

The history of that apostasy is at hand, so that its main characteristics can easily be traced. Is it not true that in proportion as any man has represented a divine principle he has been rejected and persecuted by those for whose special advantage that principle was held? Instead of saying divine principle, say truth, in any of its bearings, and let the answer be decided by history. Has not Abel always been an offence to Cain? Has not Joseph always been hated by his brethren? Has not Moses always been reproached by the multitude? Has not Elijah always been a troubler in Israel? The history of general civilisation would justify the spirit of the same inquiries. To-day the men who lead the world are able to recall memories of the misinterpretation and harsh usage to which they are exposed as the teachers of once unpopular doctrines; and the men who are now teaching unwelcome principles strengthen themselves by reviewing the triumphant progress of once rejected truth. Clearing the suggestion of all that is in the least degree fanatical, does it not distinctly point out that, ever since the divine government was challenged in Eden, divine principles have only been re-adopted after angry protest, and often not until after crucifixion? Let any man, even in this enlightened and liberal age, request a hearing for a new interpretation of truth, or a suggestion that is at all opposed to established ideas, and the part of the high priest will be instantly repeated. The high priest did not object to the prophecy of Christ, he objected to the form in which the alleged fulfilment of that prophecy came before him; so

the danger of the Church to-day is not that it objects to truth, but that it dogmatizes as to the form which truth shall assume. Nor is this dogmatism to be inconsiderately denounced, for the world ought not to be easily dispossessed of theories and hopes which for ages have guided and stimulated its history. Tenacity is a characteristic of faith as well as of superstition ; and to be " driven about with every wind of doctrine " is not the use, but the abuse, of spiritual liberty. Still, when every modification has been made, the suggestion is morally and historically true that divine ideas have never been wrought into the life of society without combat and even crucifixion. Every true teacher has called out the same characteristics of human depravity, as may be proved by profane as well as sacred history. What is found, therefore, in the case of Jesus Christ is not new in principle, but inasmuch as Jesus Christ differed from all the illustrious men of the past in being the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, the development of human wickedness reached, though unconsciously, the final point in charging God himself (in the person of his Son) with blasphemy. In the fury of the multitude and the obstinate hostility of the leading classes, we see what depraved human nature really is. Apart from Jesus Christ's ministry this development never could have taken place ; the fall of man never could have been understood in all its terribleness ; it never could have been made plain to men that they love darkness rather than light. What is this culmination of human depravity ? It is a rejection of God because he has revealed himself under conditions which collide with our own expectations. We have heard his words, but our prejudice rejected them ; we have seen his works, and ascribed them to Beelzebub ; we have thus convicted ourselves of that spiritual insusceptibility which,

knowing the name, knows not the nature of God. True spiritual life would have known God under any concealment ; his words would have carried their own witness to the spirit ; the whole moral nature would have been stirred with responsive gladness. What is the fact as given in the narrative ? It is that Jesus Christ came unto his own, and his own received him not ; he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. There was nothing in the soul that fully answered him when he spoke ; when he displayed the dominion of his word over all natural forces, the soul did not detect the divine tone in his voice ; he spoke to dead hearts that could not return so much as an echo. When Adam and Eve heard God's voice in the garden, they knew it and fled away ; when the most favoured nation upon earth heard God's voice through Jesus Christ they pronounced it the voice of a blasphemer ! Why should we be startled at their boldly doing so ? The inception and the consummation are identical in quality ; there is, therefore, no discrepancy between Eden and Golgotha.

Surrounded as we are by what may be called a Christian atmosphere, our entire education being penetrated more or less by Christian elements, it is difficult to carry the mind back so as to follow the chronological development of Jesus Christ's trial and condemnation, and by so much it is difficult to conceive that we should have done, in moral effect, exactly what the Jews did. Yet, having regard to the scope of Jesus Christ's work, this is a fact ; the work related not to the Jews only, but to the whole world, and as it related to the whole world, there must be identity of nature as a condition of realising its advantages. Where there is identity of nature, it is more than presum-

able that there would have been identity of operation under the same class of circumstances. In the Jews, at the time of our Lord's ministry, we see human nature in its highest religious condition ; with the most wonderful traditions and with the most exciting hopes, they stood apart from all other nations, yet in them is seen how human nature, while upholding religious forms, can be utterly destitute of religious life. In them is seen the humiliation of the whole world ; in them was the moral nature of all men faithfully represented ; we, as partakers of a common humanity, are, as were the Jews, guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ : "We hid as it were our faces from him ; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Apart from its bearing upon the mystery of the atonement, this view of the case—viz. that the condemnation of Jesus Christ was due neither to momentary malice nor to a miscarriage of justice caused by temporary excitement, much less to a sudden collapse of mere animal courage on the part of his most devoted friends, but to the natural enmity of the human heart—relieves one of two difficulties by which some readers have been much perplexed. For example, there is a difficulty connected with the recurring expression, "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." On this form of words some have grounded the supposition that the Jews were by arbitrary decree compelled to condemn and crucify Jesus Christ, that their own will was overridden, and that in the excitement of a passion which they did not enkindle they were driven to imbrue their hands in innocent blood. The whole event has been ascribed to arbitrary predestination. Now, without obtruding upon the secret counsel of Heaven, we have no need to accept a theory of foreordination, which instantly

excites the resentment of our moral instincts. The Scriptures are constructed upon a thorough understanding of human nature, and can be comprehended only so far as they are read in the light of this fact. The Bible is, in reality, a history of human nature as God views it, and as God trains it towards recovery. It is called God's Book, and so it is; but it is not the less God's exhibition of human nature in all its limitations—God's life of man as affected by sin on the one hand, and redeemed by divine loving-kindness on the other. When, therefore, it is said that such and such an act transpired "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled," it is not to be inferred that the Scriptures override human will, but that the Scriptures have anticipated the necessary development of sin and indicated with literal accuracy the culminating-point of human depravity. God knows the end from the beginning, and it is instructive to remark how this fact has given a peculiar character to the inspired writings; books, in general, refer to events which have already happened, but the Bible makes copious and precise references to circumstances which have yet to take place—a feature which perfectly accords with the omniscience of the Spirit under whose dictation it was written. The historian goes after the event, but the prophet goes before it; the writing of the latter, therefore, is either a bold speculation or an inspired pre-announcement of facts. When, however, it is said that the fact happened that the pre-announcement might be fulfilled, we are no more entitled to argue that men were compelled to do things against their will, in order that the prophets might not be contradicted, than we are entitled to argue that the Romans were compelled to invade Britain in order that the history of England might be written. Correct history is not more certainly a faithful record of fact than inspired prophecy is a faithful

anticipation of human development. When it was predicted that Jesus Christ would be despised and rejected of men, it was not determined that men should be brutalised by an irresistible power ; it was simply declared that the natural and necessary result of sin is the rejection of the living God—in other words, that “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

In the light of this suggestion there need not be any difficulty in the interpretation of passages which appear to ascribe the death of Jesus Christ to irresistible power brought to bear upon the human will. For example, there is this passage, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts ii. 23). Here the two events are put in their right relation ; the foreknowledge and determination point to the love of God in giving his Son, and the wickedness is set down to the action of a depraved but free will. Then we read, “The Son of man goeth, as it was determined : but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed” (Luke xxii. 22) ; and again, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above : therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John xix. 11). Here, too, the same relation of events is asserted ; there is a divine operation, there is also a human operation ; God gives, man rejects ; God sets his Son in a redemptive relation to men, and that very act develops the full force of depravity, and thus shows men what, notwithstanding accidental appearances to the contrary, they really are. In his address to Pilate Jesus Christ distinctly points out the divine share of the marvellous transaction. He shows that he is not to be classed with common criminals ; that his presence at the bar is part

of a great purpose which God is working out ; that human strength would have had no power, and, indeed, no opportunity, to lay wicked hands upon him had he not been given (delivered) by God expressly for the sins of the world. By grouping such passages, and confining attention to a merely human view of the subject, it has been found easy to set up some such difficulty as this : Jesus Christ came for the express purpose of saving the world. In order to save the world he must die for it ; yet the very men who put him to death are held up to the execration of the universe as murderers, whereas, but for them, the crucifixion could not have taken place, and so the atonement could not have been made. The difficulty is not in the facts, but in their misconstruction. The objection may be accepted even in the broad and repulsive form just given, and yet there is nothing in it to offend either justice or benevolence. Jesus Christ came to give himself a ransom for the world ; that is also admitted. But why those wicked men should be considered sinners above all others, when they simply carried human (not merely Jewish) depravity to its extreme point, is the difficulty. There is, however, a consideration omitted which alters the moral bearing of the subject. It is forgotten that the men who crucified Jesus Christ did not do so in the belief that they were taking a painful but necessary part in the process of redemption. What they did was done as an act of vengeance, in punishment of what they considered blasphemy. They would not listen to doctrine ; they resisted every appeal to their own Scriptures ; they stopped their ears and closed their eyes when any evidence of the Messiahship was offered ; and they treated the whole case as not at all involving their own relation to God and to sin, and, in vehement defiance of possible error on their own part, cried, " His blood be

upon us and upon our children." That was their part in the transaction. Their case must be judged upon the ground on which they themselves put it ; and it is impossible if we judge them with their own judgment to escape the conclusion that they were guilty of the foulest sin. We cannot give them the advantage of that side of the transaction which they obstinately ignored. They took their stand upon a law which they would not examine ; they professed to uphold scriptures to which they would not refer ; and therefore, through superstition which they mistook for reverence, through ignorance which they paraded as knowledge, and through personal malice which they regarded as religious zeal, they brought themselves into this great condemnation. History is constantly showing how even the worst men may be unconsciously, or even against their will, working out the greatest purposes ; yet, if they are to be judged at all, they must be judged by that side of their work which they themselves have avowed. It is universally allowed that motives are the best explanation of actions, and that men should be judged according to their motives, and not according to remote or unexpected advantages which they never contemplated and in which they never believed. Take the case of Abraham in illustration of the main bearing of this doctrine. Viewed in a merely earthly light, Abraham was guilty of murder. He had bound his son, laid him upon the altar, and lifted his arm to strike the fatal blow. Were such a thing to occur to-day, Abraham would be arrested for murder, and universal justice would demand his condemnation. Now view the case in another light. Abraham's faith in God was being tested. After sore agony of heart, Abraham prepares himself to give effect to the divine will ; religious devotion rises above natural affection, and the deed is about to be done in obedience

to the heavenly call. What then? The aspect of the case is entirely changed. What would have been murder has become the highest triumph of faith, and as the deed was about to take place, not by the murderous will of man but through supreme love of God, Abraham receives all the honour which God puts upon his children. Now as well may the filicide claim to rank with Abraham as may the Jews who crucified Jesus Christ claim to have done a religious deed. That we, under similar circumstances, would have done virtually as the Jews did, need not be denied; and if we had done so, we should have deserved the same severity of condemnation.

Happily, a most gracious truth remains to be set side by side with this condemnation. Jesus Christ prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 34); and when he gave the disciples their commission, he added, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke xxiv. 47). It follows, then, that the condemnation was not an exclusion from the blessings of redemption; the murderers were among the very first to whom those blessings were offered, and he who condemned their wickedness also prayed that they might be forgiven. He said in his prayer, "They know not what they do." This is the last stage of human depravity, beyond this there is no other depth in the abyss of sin. Madness is the climax of depravity. It will be remarked, then, that just at the point where human depravity ends in madness, divine love discloses most impressively its method of saving the world. The conjunction of the two revelations is very solemn. On the one hand, depravity reaching the point of murder; on the other, divine love accepting murder, with all its horrible associations, as the means of working out a great salvation. We are not aware that it was neces-

sary to the idea of the atonement (in any theory of it), that Jesus Christ's death should be attended by all the revolting brutality which was displayed by the multitude ; such brutality showed how deeply human nature had been degraded, but so far as the precise idea of atonement is concerned it does not appear that the mocking, buffeting, and smiting, were at all necessary. They had a use, it is true, even in relation to Jesus Christ himself ; they tested the reality of his human love and the depth of his self-oblivion, and added a deeper pathos to the expression "He became obedient unto death" by enlarging it into "even the death of the cross." The idea of atonement is exhausted at the word "death," but the boundlessness of love encloses the term "cross." We are not aware that there is anything irreverent in the inquiry, How the offering of Jesus Christ would have been made apart from the brutality of the multitude? Nothing must be assumed which would impair the perfect voluntariness of the offering. The teaching of Jesus Christ is very explicit upon this point : "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again" (John x. 17, 18). The multitude crucified him, yet he laid down his own life ; the tormentors nailed him to the cross and pierced his side, yet no man took his life from him. These appear to be mutually destructive assertions ; yet they are in thorough accord with the duality of Jesus Christ's nature. The point more especially to be considered is, whether Jesus Christ could not have made atonement for the sins of the world without undergoing the shameful process to which Jewish brutality condemned him ? The question is important as discriminating between the incidental and essential ; between the crucifixion as

showing the penal side of human law, and the "lifting up" which shows the fulfilment of God's purpose to redeem the world. Crucifixion simply as such has, of course, no redemptive meaning. So far as mere crucifixion is concerned, the two thieves suffered in common with Jesus Christ, so that unless we discover something more than crucifixion in the death of the latter, his Cross will be but a common fact in penal history.

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast given unto thy children songs in the valley. Thou dost make midnight vocal with praise. The darkness cannot frighten away the spirit of joy when thou dost send thy angel from the heavens. As for our enemies, thou dost multiply our banquet according to their number ; as for our weakness, it immediately precedes our strength. Thou hast done all things well. We now see the shape of our life. Thou hast been arranging it, and adjusting all its parts, and bringing it to its final expression ; and now, when thou art roofing in thy temple, behold, we already say, Thou hast done all things well. Thou wilt not forsake us in the time of age and weakness, in the hour of darkness and desolation. Thou wilt then show thyself to us in newness of love ; compassions we have never dreamed of shall drop their kindly tears upon our harassed lives. We have faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We say, Let alone, Let be, Stand still ; for the Lord will save those who love him, and redeem them all with a mighty arm. Forgive our folly, our littleness, our countless mistakes ; thou wilt forget them. If they humble us, they will have achieved a noble end. Help us to lie lowly before the Lord ; grant unto us increasingly the great gift of reverence ; may we be silent because the Lord is in his holy temple ; may we be almost ashamed of our prayers because they break the silence. Deepen the communion between the heart of man and the heart of God through the medium of the Cross. Oh, holy Cross, not Pilate's cross, but God's own Cross, cut out of the trees by God's own hand, and set up upon the earth, and reaching even unto heaven with infinite meanings ! Amen.

IV IN THE VALLEY.

“We abode in the valley.”—DEUT. iii. 29.

WE did not want to abide there; but the Lord thought it was best: and as we cannot be both leaders and followers, we abode in the valley. One of us had a mountain-run; the greatest of us was called, as usual, to the highest point of observation. “Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes.” Take a look; that is all you will get. “Behold”; that is all some people can get of anything. And it is not to be put down at an insignificant appraisalment. Everything depends upon the eyes that look. Some eyes take in the whole estate even when they do not appear to be looking; some eyes take in nothing. Let us not therefore suppose that Moses was not enriched by this Pisgah look. He was not to “go over this Jordan.” Joshua was charged as to his action in connection with the people; he was told that he should “go over before this people,” and “cause them to inherit the land” which Moses should only see. “We abode in the valley.” There was nothing so remarkably resigned about this. It is poetry when it is taken out of its connection; it requires the context to turn it into piety. What is it to abide in a valley when you are told that almost presently you will be taken into Canaan? It is pleasant then. Wait awhile to look round, to take last observations; to-morrow we shall be over the river and in the land flowing with milk and honey. Under such a promise it does not require great resignation to wait awhile. Thus we might

take a good deal out of the piety of our own supposed contentment with things. When men are filled with heaven, how is it that they hold the things of earth with a loose hand? How would they hold those things of earth if they had not the promise of a country out of sight? Always take in the context, not only of a literary passage, but of a man's life. In the context you find the atmosphere, the explanation, the subtle ministries which work out the angelhood and sainthood of human life. Some people have no context. How they live is a puzzle. Everything is so bare; you reach the ground so suddenly and completely; there is no sward, no mown lawn, no green velvet, no place for flowers; you are down on the flint and rock and stone so quickly that they seem to be able to tell you all their little tale of life in one barren sentence. Nor must we judge too hastily even here. The richest people in the world are sometimes the poorest when estimated from another point of view. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth," not buy it, sell it, exchange it, trouble about the detail of it; let the horse-dealer do that, let vulgarity transact all the commercial arrangements: the meek shall "inherit" the earth, enjoy it, possess it, hold it by all its finer filaments, and call it their own because of its beauty and poetry and symbolic indication of the heaven out of which it came. "The valley," are there not valleys in the highlands? There are some valleys that are a long way up. They are only relative valleys; the whole land is high. What if ours be a valley Alpine, mountainous, and itself a towering hill compared with the pits in which some men live? We must know more about your valley before we attempt to appreciate your contentment and your resignation. Where is the valley? Is the valley a pit, or is it only an undulation among the mountains? Be

faithful with yourselves, and see exactly where and what your valley amounts to.

The great thing in life is to know that we are where God wants us to be. That is peace ; that is power ; that is joy. I had rather be a doorkeeper of God's appointment than standing at the altar when he has given me no equipment for that holy position. Who is the man that is moving rhythmically, never spoiling the easy, fluent rhyme of God's proportion and God's revelation and intent ? It is the man who is standing where God placed him. Try to leave that position, and although you are a man of faculty and of considerable estimate of your own powers, you instantaneously become unsettled, uneasy ; you have spoiled something, you have changed a screw, a pivot, a wheel. What is it that makes life now go creakingly and unkindly ? You have left the election of God. There is a place for every man upon the world. Have you left your place ? Never leave a place if you can possibly help it. There is nothing so easy in the world as for a man to resign. It is sometimes not only easy, but seductive, charged with a subtle flattery, almost too subtle for words : as who should say, This is an independent action ; I can do without you : I resign ! Everything depends upon who first put you in the place. If you put yourself in the place you have a right to resign, and the sooner you resign the better ; if God put you there, it is just that you should hold long conference with God before you resign. Tell him exactly how sore you are and disappointed ; say to him, Father, everything seems to be against me in this place. I get fretted and irritated and annoyed to the point of sleeplessness. I want to leave this place : nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done. My removal must be as clearly indicated

to be right as was my settlement. I wait the vision of God. With that spirit you are always in heaven : it is the spirit of trust, it is the spirit of love, it is the spirit of music.

Valleys have advantages. The valley for me, if it be a question of all the year round ! If your year be reduced to a hot August, then I will unite with you in desiring the mountains even to the snowline ; but if it be a question of all the twelve months in and out, and I must select, surely I could have no hesitation in indicating the valley as my line of rest. What is there in the valley ? The water. There are no rivers on the tops of the mountains. The rivers are born up there. The baby-rivers, the rivers in trickling drops and all but immeasurable rills, may be up there ; but the rivers are in the valley. Woe to the man who has a long way to go for his water ; blessed are they who are within easy reach of the stream. The stream is music, the stream is purity, the stream is a kind of gospel. We could see revelations in the stream. The water is always talking ; it is always reflecting ; it is always coming from some place and going to some place : a symbol, a letter in spiritual algebra. See what a stream runs through your valley ! Have you never seen it ? Where have you been looking ? Why do you not look for it first thing in the morning ? It is always there, and yet never there exactly as it was yesterday ; an image of the continuance and the novelty of divine providence. What is in the valley ? Harvest. There are no harvests on the top of the great mountains, except harvests of snow, harvests that did not grow there, but were shed down from the towering heights. Hear what a ringing of sickles ! where is that music ? What sweet laughter !—where is it ? In the valley, on the easy uplands, on slopes

that children may climb. What a harvest there is in your valley ! Yet you are always complaining : but you would not be happy if you did not complain ; your life would be without accent if it were wholly without murmuring. When shall God see the last of that wickedness in you ? When will you simply fall on the Almighty's arms, and rest there, silently, and lovingly, and thankfully ?

What is in the valley ? Society, fellowship, the family, that sweetest of all earth's words, "home." As for the houses upon the mountains, there they are ; but they are few in number, they are scattered, they are not great centres of activity and fellowship and trust and reciprocal action. We wonder what they are doing on the mountains when the snow is falling and the wind is roaring and the lightning is playing its wondrous antics in the startled firmament. Our homes are in the valley ; our graveyards are there, the rude forefathers of the hamlet are sleeping there, and our dearest, sweetest ones that made the earth a beautiful summer-time are all in the valley. So then it may not be so great an action of resignation and contentment for us to abide in the valley and sing our hymns there. Marvellous is this action of selfishness ! We cannot get rid of it. God will not frown upon it altogether, because he knows how we are constituted. It may not be selfishness in any wicked sense, it may be selfishness as indicating individuality, and not selfishness as excluding philanthropy. But it is weary work having to fight it, and thinking that we have got it down at once at one blow ; and lo ! it stands up in all its undiminished strength, and mocks us with growing fury and spitefulness. That selfishness gathers even around the golden gates of the upper city. Sometimes we catch the soul in the enjoyment of a selfish anticipation of

heaven; it is a harp and crown and palm and robe whiter than untrodden snow. Sometimes our song is broken off in the middle because a spirit of rebuke says to us, You are longing for that heaven that you may escape discipline, service, beneficent sacrificial life. Yet God trains his saints in this school. He says, Do not expect to get over your selfishness in a day: the ideal is self-abrogation. Men cannot reach their ideals in one great leap; we have to work through ideals in detail, wearying, disappointing processes. Blessed are they whose ideals are never blurred; they may be so bright as to constitute judgment and reproach and rebuke, and yet when we have advanced one step towards them, there comes swiftly down from heaven that same host of singing angels that sang above green Bethlehem, "Glory to God in the highest!" You are going on towards perfection. Sometimes we are further off to-day than we were a week ago. That may be so to appearances; but if we have been living honest, simple, useful lives, it is not so in reality.

Did you ever see the flower grow? God has hidden some things from our sharpest scrutiny. You are sure the flower has grown; about that you have no manner or degree of doubt. Did you see it grow? No. Did you hear it grow? No. Where then is your proof? In the fact itself. But may you not have been mistaken as to what the flower was a week ago? Could you carry that week-ago flower in your eye and say you know it has grown one inch or more? May there not be a mistake on your part? No one could persuade you that there is such a mistake; you are confident that the flower has grown,—that is nothing; you are confident that the flower is growing,—that is the miracle, the mystery, the joy of God's care of the lilies of the field; it is that wondrous,

immediate, ever-moving action that makes us stand still and think. Nothing is as it was a moment ago. No man is the same man after having attended a Christian service that he was before he came in ; he is nearer heaven, or further from it : be the sermon or the service the simplest, rudest, that is a fact in the man's spiritual experience, though it may not yet have got into his consciousness ; he is a fuller or he is a leaner soul because of the service which he has attended. So it is with all things and all flowers, with all life, with all nature,—dear, sweet old nature, always making her flowers, and always spoiling them ! She is busy all the time at her wheel ; she says, Now I will have this carpet finished and right this week. See now how she sits there at the household loom. See ! she is succeeding ; the picture is growing before our very eyes ; there is an apocalypse coming up out of the very dust. And, lo ! suddenly some rough wind or cold rain or contemptuous lightning, and she has all to begin over again. Bless her old sweet heart, she is able to begin again ! She is the spirit of eternal hope. Copy that mother nature, thou poor sluggard or heartless one, and begin again. A thousand beginnings may add up almost to a good ending.

Christians should study the advantages of their position. It is something to have been born in a Christian country. The poorest child in the earth, so far as civilisation is concerned, comes into a great inheritance at once. The child may not have brought with it much of parchment and legal status and claim, but every child born in civilisation is born to great riches. There is a law of primogeniture and entail which no court established and which no court can disannul. What are your advantages ? If I hear you reckon up your advantages I wait with eager impatience

for you to mention your religious privileges. You are going to change your dwelling-place ; let me hear what you are about. You say you are going to a larger house (very good), where you have a fine view of a beautifully wooded country (very good); from the upper windows you can see what to a Londoner seems to be almost heaven. What more? "A most salubrious neighbourhood." Very good: what more? "That is about all." Any religious privileges over there? "We have not had time yet to look into that." Ah me! the very first thing that ought to have been settled. Are there any leading souls there that can stir you out of laggardliness, indifference; that can conquer almost invincible reluctance in spiritual directions? Are there any magnetic, electric forces there,—souls that will not let you rest until you are in proportion and rhythm with the whole scale and movement of God? There may be a man in your neighbourhood who can so pray, and pray in public, that to unite with him in prayer is to be in a land flowing with milk and honey. Ah me! thou poor, poor crucified Christ! even thine own nominal followers will often tell us everything but the right thing,—the open way to the Cross into the open heaven.

Blessed be God, there is a valley in which we shall not abide: we walk through it. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Brethren, there is no abiding in death. If we belong to the Lord by the right of his Cross and the right of his blood, we do not die, we "walk through." I like the Psalmist's beautiful image; when he is what we call dying, he says he is walking through. It is very dark, but in the one hand there is a rod and in the other hand there is a staff, and they have in them all the comfort of light

and all the sustenance of love. He does not say, Yea, though I abide in the valley; yea, though I linger in the valley; yea, though I am caught and imprisoned in the valley;—no, no! he says, “Yea, though I walk through.” Men walk through gardens; men walk through fields on the Sabbath day and pluck the ears of corn and rub them into bread. The Psalmist will walk through the valley. The Apostle Paul will not die, he will ascend. Christ hath abolished death. Poor, poor death! What! abolished? It is an act of contempt, and yet an act of sovereignty. There is death, and Christ hath abolished it. Where is it? It cannot be found: death itself is dead. O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory? Death, thou didst make a dark valley, damp, drear, unlighted valley, and thou didst say grimly, Here I will imprison the so-called saints of God. And lo! I looked, and behold a second like unto the Son of man, and he led the poorest, weakest of his believers right through. Into what? Ay, into what? Eye hath not seen it, ear hath not heard it. To know it we must languish into life!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast done great things for us ; whereof we are glad. Thou hast kept our feet from falling, our eyes from tears, our souls from death ; thy love has been round about us night and day. We have nothing that we have not received. We are thy workmanship, we are not made with hands ; even in our fallen and rude estate we bear marks of divine origin. Thou hast supplied our table, our cup runneth over, goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life. These angels have never been away from us ; they have sung to us, they have held the light over the head when the road was darkest, they have spoken to us words which only the heart could hear. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. The Lord hath gone before us and behind us, and his hand has been laid upon us ; in the darkness we have seen the light, and in the light we have seen a glint of heaven. For all thy care, thy love, thy tender patience, we bless thee. Continue to abide with us that we may see thee more clearly. Make our hearts more pure, remove the cloud of guilt ; then we shall see a light above the brightness of the sun, and there shall be great joy in our heart. Thou knowest our life ; thou knowest what loads some men have to carry, how burdened they are, and weary, and sore of heart ; how they are afraid of the morning coming because it brings with it some new perplexity. Thou knowest how the weary long for rest, and how those who are conscious of sin are asking questions about the pardon of God. Lead us one and all to Calvary. We want to die where Jesus died, to rise where Jesus rose. We would be crucified with Christ, and we would be raised again with our Lord ; then shall we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and our sins which are many shall all be forgiven us. When the enemy brings in his indictment and counts up all our errors and sins, and calls them all our wickedness, and forces us to contemplate the tremendous impeachment, show us written across the whole in red letters those gospel words, The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. Amen.

V.

RIVER AND SEA.

"For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over."—JOSH. iv. 23.

THAT is true. We saw it. We were there. It is happening every day. Put out the mere detail and put in the great picture, and what is it? It is divine interposition in the affairs of life; it is God taking away all hindrances to the progress which he himself has purposed and defined—not the hindrances to your progress, but the hindrances to his own progress, as shown through your life. He will not take any stones out of our way if they lie between us and ruin; he will rather imbed those stones a little more firmly. Why is he so hard with us? We want to go along this road, and cannot do so. We do not see any enemy, but there is one; there is a force we cannot estimate, we cannot modify, we cannot set aside. Why will not God allow us to go down this road? Because this road ends in ruin. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof." Oh, that end! the end! The road is flowery enough, wide enough, sunny enough; but the end is the one thing that men will not look at. Reasoning men, intellectual men—almost angels, so noble in reason, so majestic in faculty—shut their eyes and will not look at the only thing worth looking at—the end. God be praised for his hindrances! We wanted to make that contract, and could not. We had the pen in hand to sign it, but the ink would not flow, or the light suddenly gave out, and we dropped the pen. What did it? We see now: we were going to sign

away our birthright, our liberty, our honour, our conscience, and we were doing this more or less unconsciously, and God said, No. Blessed be God for his denials! Sometimes we are able to say, Blessed be God for his bereavements. No bereavement is ever agreeable at the time. Bereavement that we almost long for always brings a keen, stinging sorrow. We say about a life that has troubled us, What a mercy it would be if that life could be removed! and when it is removed, Ah me, the house is no longer the same, all the flowers are dead, all the winds are full of winter! So strangely made are we that sometimes when we get an answer to our own prayer we would rather not take it. Let God alone. Let us put our lives just into his hands, and say, Lord, they are thy lives more than ours; thou hast only lent them to us. We would not spoil one moment of these trembling frailties which we call our lives; undertake everything for us, and use us. We will run thine errands, we will obey thy will, we will do what thou dost bid us do. Lord, undertake all for us; then if there is a river in the way thou wilt dry it up, if there is a Red Sea in the way thou wilt command it to stand back, and we shall walk through the beds of rivers as if they were beds of roses.

He dried up the river, he dried up the sea; he did both things. He did the little thing and the great thing. We call them little and great; to God there is nothing great, to God there is nothing little. We need such qualifying terms in order to make out our case, to settle our accounts, and to distribute as between man and man what we consider to be due and right and proportionate; but when God made the universe he humbled himself to wear so poor a garment. Yet let us be careful here lest we lose our piety and our trust

in God. It requires omnipotence as much to make a daisy as to make a constellation. We tread the daisy into the greensward, and think nothing of it ; we look at the constellation, and wonder. If we were right in soul we should look down at the daisy, and marvel : eternity is there—all light, all force, all wisdom, the heart of infinity, the tenderness of God. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father ; consider the lilies of the field how they grow ; the birds, how they fly and feed without table-spreading. It required omnipotence as much to dry up the Jordan as to dry up the Red Sea. Why do we not make more of the so-called little providences of life ? We are always, as were the contemporaries of the historical Christ, looking out for wonders, signs, miracles, mighty blazing tokens of what we call almightiness. They are all in your house ; they are all in your own little life. You, poorest, humblest creature, greatest, strongest man, you are a miracle.

Man is degraded deity. By that is not meant that he is deity disgraced or dishonoured, but deity down-stepped, deity a few steps lower,—degraded, levelled down. What wonder this life be full of pain ? Incompleteness always means agony, struggle, battle, conflict, aspiration ; blessed be God if sometimes it should mean prayer, faith, hope ! You want to know what wonderful things God has done for you ; ask yourselves rather what God has done that is not wonderful. We are more struck by destruction than we are by creation, simply because of our folly, our moral incompleteness ; whereas the great miracle is continuity. Even men can do little things for a moment, but because there is no deepness of earth they soon wither away. God hath deepness of earth : things are rooted in God. He does nothing for the moment only :

God works from eternity to eternity ; herein is that saying true, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God"; not only in essential deity, but in act, in providence, in thought, in purpose. The touch of God sends a vibration through infinity. Do not therefore be looking for romances in your life ; look for little daily, kindly providences, small Calvaries, outlined crosses, all of which point towards Golgotha and the tree of life.

You would be greatly comforted as I have been in a thousand instances by reasoning from the river to the sea. This is the right method of inference, of induction, and of deduction. What has God done for us in the past ? Hear David ; he said, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this uncircumcised Philistine," I will strike him in the name of the Eternal. Was it a rash act ? It was reasoned piety. What, did the young man's blood boil for one moment and then subside ? It was all the piety of the past gathered up into one supreme stroke. Sometimes one act of faith condenses a lifetime of study, experience, and prayer. Wondrously doth life bring its own power, and marvellously doth yesterday contribute its quota to the affairs of to-day. When the great man advises you upon a certain course, he does not speak from the moment ; for a quarter of a century and more he has been buried in the study of the law, and therefore when he gives you an advice that could be written down in a line he puts a lifetime to that line. When the hoary physician touches your pulse, half a century touches it. So we should thus see God moving us in contemplation and in faith from the Jordan to the Red Sea. He says to us as we near the sea, What about the Jordan ? was there one drop of the Jordan water on the soles of your feet ? No, Lord, there

was not. Then, saith he in reply, as with the Jordan, so with the Red Sea ; it shall be dried up as if it had never been. When the disciples said, How can we feed this multitude? he said, You did feed a multitude once, what lack was there then? None. Had the people barely enough to eat? No. How many baskets took you up? Twelve. And he left them to carry out the reasoning, and to say if he could do it once he could do it twice ; if he could do it once he can do it for ever. Herein is the miracle of God, that he teaches us by what he did yesterday what he is going to do to-morrow. If you have no faith in to-morrow surely you have faith in your own recollection of yesterday. There are timid souls, you may belong to the number, who never dare look at to-morrow. The Lord says to them, Then think about yesterday that is over : now what was done to you yesterday? You thought your heart was going to burst : did your heart break yesterday? No. You thought all things were against you yesternight : did one star fall out of its place? No, Lord ; they are all there. Then said God, As yesterday, so to-morrow ; as the Jordan, so the Red Sea ; to you the river is great and the sea is greater, but to God there is nothing great. Infinity is not broken up into inches. If you would reason so you would pray well. Trusting is prayer. Confidence is worship. You may have no gift of words, and yet your soul may say, I rest upon the divine promise : if God had not been good yesterday, I might have distrusted him for to-morrow, but he was so good yesterday, he made my cup run over. When did God ever half-fill a cup? When did God grow almost a flower? What stars has he left unsphered for want of material or want of force? When he has completed these little miracles of matter and magnitude and velocity, he says he is able to do exceeding abundantly

above all that we ask or think. To ask is to use words, to think is to exhaust all the little mental strength we have. "Above" is God's word; "above" is one of the keywords of Scripture.

The witness of God must always be in our own experience. When men argue with one another how seldom they refer to experimental religion! Yet the Christian himself should be a living epistle; every Christian life should be a solemn argument. Blessed be God my life has become my trust! I see now what God has done, and I have given everything into his hands, saying, Thou hast done all things well. What is your experience? How have you been treated in straits and perplexities and difficulties? Who cooled your fever? Who brought light when all was darkness? When the poor and the needy sought water and there was none and their tongue failed for thirst, who opened the fountain and set the streams flowing through the burning sand? Sometimes men write little tracts for the purpose of proving that there is no God, and the little tracts all flutter down again upon the desk where they were written. The world does not want them, the world does not believe them. Their writers did not believe them. They thought they did, but they were not conscious of their whole selves; they did not know themselves when they wrote such pitiful diatribes and blasphemies against the nearness, tenderness, and power of God. Yet the Bible flies; it flies over all the nations, and showers down upon listening generations the music of heaven. The Bible only needs to be compared with other books. It asks for nothing but to be read. Other religions are poetries, idealisms, struggles after the impossible. The revelation of God is poetry also, and philosophy the highest, sublimest reasoning; but if

it were only that, we might lose it. In addition to that, it comes down into our life, strengthening, succouring, comforting, directing, and making good all the outline, all the substance, and all the essence of life. Bacon saith, A little learning inclineth to atheism ; but much learning, great wisdom, makes men pray. Whenever you doubt God, think that you are but feebly or superficially instructed. When you can rest upon him four-square, know that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

How true it is that all things in life are done by an unseen power in so far as they are either good or bad. The devil is as invisible as God. How wonderful a thing it is that life becomes shaped into palaces and temples without any handling of our own. The Jordan was dried up, not with hands ; the Red Sea was dried up, not with hands. Hands ! Poor hands ! What can hands make ? They cannot make a flower. We thought that the hand itself was a proof of the existence of God. Men have even so written upon the hand as to make out that itself is an argument in defence and exposition of the personality and providence of God ; and they are perfectly right : and yet even that hand God will not trust with almightiness. The hand is incomplete, as well as the head. What can the hand make ? Not fruits ; the hand never made a peach. What can the hand make ? Only what it can break. Hand-make hand-break is the little proverb I would suggest. Whatever can be made by the hand can be unmade by the hand. God himself takes all primary ministry into his own power and employs us, even when we are going about our own errands, simply as his messengers. We are either God's servants or the devil's servants. You cannot get out of service. Once this same great warrior-writer put the whole thing in a

sentence that is almost paradoxical. Said Joshua, "Choose ye"—that is freewill; "Choose ye"—that consults the independence of man. Go on. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Where is your independence now? You come into the sentence with great freedom of will; you go out of it bondmen. It must be so. This is the reason and this the explanation of all things. Freewill there certainly is: necessity is undeniable; all life as it grows wisely and well turns and tends to service. Blessed be God there is a bondage of love, there is a slavery of joy. Are you dreading the Jordan? God will dry it up for you if you put your trust in him. Are you dreading the Red Sea? He will blow it away with the wind of his mouth when you come within a step of it—nay, you may have to touch it, but the moment the foot of faith touches that sea the sea is gone. Observe, when the priests came to the river it was flowing; when they were within one inch of the sea, when their foremost step was being taken, and their feet were, so to say, hovering over the water, it was still there; but the moment their foot touched the water, in that splash was wrought the miracle of God. You may have some hard work to-morrow; I shall have. Every man must fight his own battle, go his own journey, face his own foes, and go right boldly into the darkness. No man may go with thee, my brother. Thou dost not want a man. God will not forsake thee either at the river or at the sea.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may we put searching questions to ourselves, lest we live in a fool's paradise and die the death of those who are without understanding! We bless thee for our reason: may we exercise it thoroughly; may we not be afraid of its questioning, may we respond to it as to a conscience. We thank thee for the oversight of our lives. Thou dost look down upon us and inquire concerning our action; yea, thou dost search our hearts and try our reins and hold thy candle above the secret recesses of our hearts. We rejoice in this, though it be with trembling. Who can escape the eye of God? The wings of the morning cannot carry us out of thy universe; there are no depths hidden from the searching of thine eyes. Yet we bless thee that our motive is known in heaven. Sometimes our motive is better than our conduct; blessed be God, for this is his own doing, in that he would set his seal upon us and give us evidence of his presence and his love. Thou dost call us to thyself by manifold voice and token; thou dost bid us welcome to the feast of thy love; thou dost offer us that which is above rubies and which no riches can buy—the wisdom of heaven, pure, peaceable, full of the quality of God. All this we have learned of Christ—Christ the Man, Christ the Saviour, Christ the Priest. We have said unto him, My Lord and my God; and he has not rebuked our ascriptions of deity. We bow down before him as crowned with thorns and crowned with stars; we come to him as he bleeds on the cross, as he rules in infinite strength upon the throne. He is ours, first and midst and last; ours in eternity, and in time, and in eternity again; from everlasting to everlasting the Saviour of man. Help us to know him better, to obey him more lovingly and completely; may we represent him in the entirety of his lovely character: and to this end grant unto us daily baptism of the Holy Ghost, the indwelling presence of the Eternal Spirit, so that in every thought, and in the beginning of every thought, ere yet the thought itself has been reached, we may be found at least groping after God. Then shall our life have no burden which we cannot bear, no sorrow which we will not even welcome; its bereave-

ments shall be new treasures, and all its grief shall be the beginning of new bliss. Thus fall we into the hands of God. There we have rest; there we have heaven! Amen.

VI.

MUTUAL OVERSIGHT.

“Thus saith the whole congregation of the Lord, What trespass is this that ye have committed?”—JOSH. xxii. 16.

THIS was the speech which the children of Israel made to the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, when they built an altar by Jordan, “a great altar to see to.” Might not the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh do what they pleased about altar-building? Did they not live in a free country? What right had anybody to interfere? These are the questions we would ask to-day. The questions of frivolity never change; they never acquire depth, solemnity, dignity of the highest kind. The questions of frivolity are impetuous, selfish; indicating irritability, jealousy, and fear of the overthrow of personal independence. Personal independence, forsooth! there is no such thing when life comes to its last and truest analysis. The children of Israel had a right to inquire about the altar which the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had built. We cannot lift a hand without compromising somebody. Life is much more subtle, delicate, sensitive, responsive than some of us have ever imagined. It is not a rough vulgar clod; it is a spirit, a ghost, a spectre, a wondrous subtlety, touched at a million points by a million ministries; out of it goes what is incalculable as to influence and as to destiny. It is of consequence to the universe what the least child in all

the nurseries of the world thinks or does. The universe is a great heart, filling all things, and hearing all things, and wondering all things concerning its inhabitants, its populations, its interests.

There are common rights entrusted to us. They belong to every man. No man has a right to coin a shilling of his own. The shilling is silver, metal of some kind, and here is a skilled man who can turn base metal into all the appearance of real current coin; he can make an excellent head and an excellent legend, and it would puzzle the craftiest to discover the simulation. Has he not a right to do it? has he not a right to use his own skill? Has he to wrap up his talent in a napkin? He will not be allowed to coin a single penny piece; he must go to the mint for every coin he has. The coin belongs to the poorest man and to the richest in the realm. It is the current, the flowing, the circulating coin; and wherever it goes it must carry with it the special value, either in token or in substance. We all acknowledge that to be the case. But we do not all carry our acknowledgment to its larger issues; otherwise we would all be really good men. We admit enough to be expanded into gospels, and revelations, and into character, and final destiny. We cannot put a fullstop after our own admissions. If we admit anything that is true, we admit all God. We may not drive on our reasoning to ulterior points and ultimate consequences; but these points and consequences are in it, and God will find them, and will say at the last, "Thou wicked and slothful servant! out of thine own mouth I condemn thee: thou knewest thou oughtest therefore." Suppose then we carry on the admission respecting the coinage, and come to the higher matter of language. No man has a right to alter or palter with

the language of a country. Herein the law is sound and good, that all words must be interpreted in their plain and honest meaning, such as would be attached to them by the general understanding of the country. We cannot live upon esoteric explanations. The law will not allow us to change words and to use them in perverted meaning. Language must be as current as coin. You are not allowed to call tenpence a shilling in arithmetic or in the pence-table or in commercial transactions. No more ought we to be allowed to say Peace where there is no peace. As we cannot have a double currency, we cannot have double language. Herein the Saviour sweetly said, Let your Yea be yea, and your Nay, nay, and no more—no shadows and sidelights and mental reservations and ambiguous qualifyings: let the heart speak out with sincerest frankness, so that children can understand the words you utter as to their moral import. There is no right of trespass. Why not recognise this in morals? We recognise it in footpaths, in currency, in the construction of documents with their clauses and their covenants. We have a mother tongue and we appeal to that mother tongue for its own best meaning: why not go into the region of morals? There is no right of drunkenness. May not a man get drunk when he pleases? No, not when society is right. No man has a right to breathe an unsavoury breath in the common air. No man has a right to reel home. He offends the womanhood of the world, the childhood, the delicacy, the honour of the land. He must come home upright, straight, sane.

The application of this principle would make society its own censor, would deliver us from the vicious influence of many a shallow sophism, would develop the

true meaning of the doctrine that each man is his brother's keeper. There are no self-rights in the narrowest sense of the term. Why are there no self-rights? Because there is no self. Self was destroyed the moment the second person came upon the scene of the world. We shall never get right so long as we maintain that there is a self, a self-interest, a self-idolatry, a self-trust. In Christ every man is part of every other man. We are members one of another. In the great commonwealth of the Cross, whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it ; whether one member rejoice there is common laughter in the household, sweet jollity, true gladness, for the hand has been honoured, or the head, or the foot. This is the Christian commune ; not a commune of robbery, but a commune of sympathy. Suppose there should be a great theological discussion in the Anglican Church ; suppose a Nonconformist should interpose and make some contribution to the controversy : or suppose the case to be directly opposite, there is a controversy, let us assume, in Nonconformity, and some Anglican divine offers a contribution towards its solution : has either party the right to say, This business is ours, and not yours? Theology is not of private trusteeship ; theology belongs to the whole Church. Every man has a right to interpose when the great terms God, truth, honour, life, are concerned in any degree. It may be a rough and unwelcome way of intervening ; by so much as the way is rough and unwelcome it may be rebuked : but the right of interference is an eternal trust. The Church belongs to every man. Every Church is part of the whole household of God. There is, therefore, assuming earnestness, sincerity, and intelligence, no such thing as wanton interference with the affairs of any other Church. No Church has any affairs of its own. By taking to it the name of Christ

it takes to itself the expanse of infinity and all the rights which go with brotherhood in the Saviour.

There is no right of nuisance. There is no right of violation even among the sentimental sanctities of life. We are to respect general sentiment. We are sometimes so to restrain ourselves as to consult the deepest convictions of other men. We may by our very rudeness do more harm than good. Where there is a great Christian sentiment in any neighbourhood, no man in that neighbourhood has any right to violate it. He may say, These people are mistaken, but in their mistake there is nothing vicious. It is a speculative and not a moral mistake; and I have no right to cross the expression of their deepest interests and their deepest sympathies. The law says we must not vitiate the air. The law has undertaken to sit high up to watch certain effusions of vapour and smoke, and the law has come down to say when these effusions are too large or too numerous, and the persons responsible for them must be punished. Do we admit that? Better not; if we do we have constructed a great white throne before which we must be judged. What, not vitiate the air, the ever-circulating public air, and yet vitiate the moral atmosphere? Out of thine own mouth I condemn thee, thou poor state-paid chemist, thou hireling inspector! Forsooth! we must not vitiate the air, but we may vitiate the spiritual atmosphere, the moral wind. There is no right of blasphemy. Better that all the chimneys of all the factories in creation should be breathing out their torrents and volumes of smoke night and day, than that any man should utter one profane expression. Which is the man who has vitiated the air, even the common, generous, hospitable air—the man who has allowed a chimney to smoke in the course of honest

commerce, or the man who had told a lie? The time will come when there will be no hesitation in giving a decision upon that inquiry. The man who has spoken one impure, ignoble, dishonouring word has shocked the universe.

This law of mutual oversight includes and involves all institutions, agencies, and ministries now at work in the education and government of the world. Schools have no right to teach what they like. Every parent must be a school-inspector. Every parent must inquire what the child is drinking in ; because its mental and spiritual health depends upon what is imbibed at the fountains of instruction. You cannot give away your parental rights in this matter. You must not allow your child to be poisoned. You would not allow him to be poisoned by chemical compounds ; will you allow him to be poisoned by false reasoning, false morality, or by any of the subtle spiritual ministries which are brought to bear upon his motive and his action? We have a right to inquire into all apprenticeships. No parent has a right to apprentice his child to a bad trade. The child may have but poor rights of protest ; before the law he is only an infant, a minor may not be heard at the great bar ; but there is a greater bar at which a child must be heard, and must be heard in the light and under the suggestion of general human experience : and I claim that no man has a right to apprentice his child to any trade that is dishonourable, impure, and unworthy. Do not say the child will grow out of it. He may never do so. You put him into it, and if he goes to hell you must go with him. You cannot be allowed to part with the child when you like. The child has rights ; he says, You set me in this connection ; in the most impressible period of my life you subjected me to these influences. I resisted, protested,

reasoned with you, and you forced me into these environments, and now that my hands are taken off and my eyes put out and my whole inner nature is dissolved, will you allow me to go to hell alone, an orphan in everlasting darkness? If you have got wrong in this particular, retrieve that wrong as soon as you can; bring the child back, pay the penalty, and be true to God and honour, to Christ and righteousness, and your reward is assured. We have a right to interfere with the whole question of companionship. "The companion of fools shall be destroyed." If you see any young man forming a wrong companionship, and you can prove that companionship to be wrong, you must not be silent. You may not be able to dissolve that companionship, but you can protest against it; you can point out your reasons, you can show all the urgency of a truly Christian nature, and this you are bound to do. We have a right to exercise mutual oversight in the matter of doctrines. False doctrine is worse than bad bread. False conceptions regarding Christ and life and destiny are infinitely worse than treating the body in any unworthy way. A man is no better than his doctrine when it comes to a clear summing up of things. If his doctrine is only in his head, we care nothing for it; but if his doctrine has got down into his heart, it must come up again in his whole spirit and conduct. Therefore, belief is life; doctrine is action; and inasmuch as action brings with it continual influence ever-multiplying, we have a right to look into its sources and fountains and origins.

Expand this principle, and fearlessly apply it, and what comes of society? Society must be reconstructed at once if these principles are to have full sway, and that they ought to have full sway seems to be the suggestion of

reason and not of mere sentiment. We must exercise this oversight in all literature. To-day it is impossible to say what influence is being exerted by corrupt publications. We ought to remember that there are various sections of literature ; we have not only the Bodleian Library and the British Museum, we have our home literature and our perambulator literature, our stealthily-purchased and stealthily-perused literature, the books that we hide and read when it is thought we are asleep. Has the Christian Church no right of oversight in these matters? There may be no right of mere police censorship, but there should be such a creation of public sentiment that a bad book shall be worse than a spoken oath ; for the oath may be spoken in a moment's passion, but the book abides, and reappears, and waits, and poisons by its very presence. May I not read what I like? No : what you read you may digest ; what you digest comes up again in the form of manhood and conduct. Society may not be able to exercise a directive and controlling influence at the point of thought, but when that thought is developed into action society comes down upon you with its approbations or its censures. But in the Christian Church we ought not to wait until we find merely magisterial right to interfere ; we are to be guided by spiritual intuitions and by holy suggestions and by sacred standards ; and we must therefore, so acting, do our utmost to put down all vicious reading. By this do I mean that we are to put down all reading that is interesting, vivacious? Nothing of the kind. Dull reading is vicious. There can be no dull reading where there is real truth and real earnestness. I would not seek to discredit the creations of genius, I would allow genius a cage as large as the firmament to fly in ; but when genius becomes debased, debasement is not the less low and defiled

because it is consecrated by the lust of genius. Given these principles and their application, and where is society? Society should be its own constable. Society should protect itself. Every man should feel that he belongs to every other man, and that his experience is a common property, and his silence is blasphemy, when wrong is being done or right is being injured. When people live in fear of each other it is generally when they are afraid to do right. It is amazing how much people are influenced by other people who would hardly acknowledge the range and energy of that influence in mere words. How many people say, We do not object to this ourselves, but what would the neighbours think of it? For our own part we think this is right, but we think it better not to do it on account of others. Here we have the right principle falsely applied. The consideration of others is the very principle of the text, but when the thing to be done is a right thing, and is not done for fear of others, then the right principle is driven to a wrong application, and by the very energy and divinity of the principle we must resist that form of putting it into activity. "He's a slave who dare not be in the right with two or three." There is a fear of society that is wholesome; there is a regard for others, as we have insisted, that is the expression of the very spirit of the text and of the very spirit of Christianity. My one point is to drive in upon ourselves a consciousness of the necessity of looking into the origin and meaning of our fear, lest we should be the victims of poltroonery when we think we are the servants of social consideration.

Christianity takes the oversight of the whole world. The Bible interferes with everybody and everything; the Bible will let nothing alone. Herein we find the inspiration

of the book. It searches into all interests and all claims and all institutions and all secret life by right. By what right? By the right of life. The sun does not say, By your leave! It shines, and in shining shows the reality of things. You think the house is very clean: draw up the blinds when the sun is shining, and it will be very clean if you are not ashamed of it. The sun does not create the dust, the sun simply silently shows it. There is no critic so severe as the sun. No tone of reproach can we hear from the courts in which he dwells; when he looks upon our cleaned vessels and our scoured floors and tables, we give judgment against ourselves. It is even thus with the Sun of Righteousness. We do not know how foul we are until we are under the rays of the righteousness of Christ. Comparing ourselves amongst ourselves, we are wise, yea, some of us are respectable; yea, there are some of us who wouldn't speak to others lest our respectability should be impaired. Now all the blinds are down and the shutters are closed. Open them, let the plentiful light of the Cross of Christ stream upon your respectability, and where is it? what is it? who would own it? This is the oversight of Christ,—a judgment in words, a rebuke in sentences, no doubt; but a sterner judgment and a more tremendous rebuke in simple exhibition of divine light. We know what this is in other departments of life. We think ourselves well-informed until we come side by side with a man who is really and in the largest sense intelligent, and then we are glad to conceal our ignorance under the veil of listening silence.

We think ourselves to be good so long as we are walking with a Pharisee, and we think ourselves to be superfinely good when we are incidentally brought into relationship with a publican or a sinner; but when Christ

joins us on the road we feel that he is exposing our shortcomings simply by the exhibition of his own perfectness. How have we been judging ourselves? What has been the standard of our criticism? The Bible, let us repeat, searches into all things. It wants to know how we keep the house. When the Bible comes to examine the house it does not look on the tablecloth; it puts its fingers under the corners, and oh! that look of sadness when it beholds the reality of the case. Words would spoil such eloquence. The look is speech. The Bible comes to try the weights and the measures, saying, "A false balance is an abomination unto the Lord," giving us our weights back again with the remark, They are short! Men do not like this kind of preaching. They love to dwell in coloured clouds: how fine the poetry! how striking the apostrophe! how strong in utterance that final climax that smote like an opening volcano! That kind of preaching they love; but the oversight that examines motive, thought, purpose, conduct, the preaching that searches the heart and tries the reins, what shall be done with it? Crucify it, crucify it! The world will be easier when such pulpits are burned to ashes. We want an oversight that will assist us to be externally more in keeping with our own ideas of finery and respectability; we do not want that oversight which says, Until the heart is right the conduct cannot be pure. Yet this is Christ's doctrine, this is the very meaning of Christ's Cross. He did not come to remove a blot from the surface, he came to heal a wound in the heart. How can he get to that death-spot? Not by the waters of the river, not by the torrents of Niagara, or the fountains of the great deep. Only one thing can get down there and work its wonder there. What is that one thing? The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, that cleanseth from all sin.

PRAYER.

FATHER in heaven, thy name is Love. We cannot tell what love is. We know it by some of its fruits and expressions, but what it is in the depth and whole extent of its scope we cannot tell. Still, we say to ourselves and to one another, God is love ; each word a mystery, each word a song. We know that thou art love because we have received so much at thine hands ; we have nothing that we have not received ; we are bought men, we are redeemed souls ; a price has been paid for us, not in silver and gold, but in blood, even the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thou hast redeemed the whole world. When we first saw the Lamb of God One said unto us, Behold him that taketh away the sin of the world. Thou art the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. Verily thou hast no pleasure in the death of men ; thy tender cry is, Why will ye die ? This is a wonder unto ourselves, yet how true it is that we love death ; we run after the wages of unrighteousness, we turn our back upon God. Yet if sin is wonderful, thy grace is still more wondrous : where sin aboundeth grace doth much more abound,—sin the little turbid rill, grace the infinite ocean. We bless thee, we magnify thy name, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. Our lives know thee in all their need and pain. We know what we want, we cry out for the living God ; as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks so do our hearts pant after the fulness of grace and truth. Thou hast come unto us in Jesus Christ thy dear Son ; we know him by name, we have companied with him many a day, we have sat at his feet and heard his words and seen his look and felt his touch, and we have beheld him upon the cross, dying, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable Gift ! We would live in Christ, for Christ we would live ; we would count all things lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Help us thus to live ; give us release from every tormenting memory ; save us from every fatal solicitude ; lead us by thy hand ; guide us by thine eye ; suffice our souls with thy counsel. We pray for one another, for the old man and the little child, for the toilers and the men at ease, for those to whom

life is a great torment, for those whose bread is soaked in tears. We bless thee for any ray of sunlight that strikes the earth which our sin has desolated; we thank thee for every tone of music which we yet retain; and we ask thee to guide us and comfort us to the end. For all holy men gathered home we bless thee; for all lives completed in usefulness and sweetness we praise the Lord as for fields that have been garnered. We pray for the stranger within our gates from the far-away land; may there be no sense of home-sickness, but may the fellowship of the saints overpower every other feeling and bring our souls into a common joy. We pray for those in pain, for those we shall never see again because they are appointed to die. We pray for those who have suffered loss by death, that they may be illumined and sustained and comforted from on high. We pray for those in trouble on the sea; we pray for those who are about to throw themselves away recklessly at the devil's bidding: even yet they may be saved! The Lord make grey hairs blossom with spring, and the Lord grant unto grief the sanctification which turns it into joy. Amen.

VII.

GOD AS CONSTRUCTOR.

"The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The Lord lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground."—Ps. cxlvii. 2-6.

YOU have an ear for music? If so, then you heard these words: "The Lord doth build the Lord gathereth together the Lord healeth the Lord telleth the number of the stars the Lord lifteth up the meek." That did not pass your ear unheeded. When we read these words in Psalm cxlvii. you heard every tone. You were not buying and selling and getting gain in the rude market-place when this music filled the air; you were not solicitor to the devil when these holy strains appealed to your attention.

This is our God. Here is an almost complete delineation of his attributes and of the purpose of his sovereignty. They are little words. Where any word is in two syllables it might be turned into one syllable, and a little child might learn it. It is of the very nature of God that he cannot be reached by long words: no ladder can rest its head on the horizon. We are greatest when we are least in the presence of God; and God is most to us in dew-drops rather than in blazing suns, creating eternal noonday and lying beyond the line of our measurement. The dewdrop is small; it can be looked at altogether; the sun cannot do more than fill it, yet it seems to take in the whole sun and to give him back a radiant circle: a wondrous power of condensation and reproduction; a most marvellous mirror this, where the sun can see himself in a dewdrop. Here are dewdrop words, little terms for little readers; for the oldest man, if he has used his time right, is the youngest of all the readers. Should any one inquire, What is God? reveal to us as far as you can the nature of God,—we should sit down before this 147th psalm and in its opening words find out everything about God which it is needful for us now to know.

“The Lord doth build.” He does not want to throw down. The very first intelligence we receive concerning him is that which conveys to us the fact that he is a builder. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” He is a constructor. The Lord does not throw down with violence to show how terrible is his almightiness. If he were less mighty he would be turbulent; because he is almighty he is all-tranquil. The Lord wants to build up our souls, our character, our manhood; he has from the beginning of his thought wished to “create” man. When we have asked to see

the plan and specification by which he has been proceeding in his building, he says he began to create man in his own image and likeness. He took the body from a low point; that has been subject to evolution. No calculator can tell how long that body has been in shaping, but when it was fit for the divine breathing then it became the very house of God. We are not evolved into gods; the gift of God is immediate, prompt, complete. It grows, not in its essential nature, but in its relationships and outputtings, in its aspirations and services. Poor old dust-body! Nobody can tell where it came from; the lower down the better, it is all the more a miracle of God; but one day, wondrous time! an hour rosy with the fullest sunlight, musical, because abounding in all holy influence, God inhabited this body, entered it, and man became a living soul, and the old dust quaked under the new Presence. When could dust build a tabernacle for Deity? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him; he cannot build a house for himself large enough to hold his infinity. Yet he can condescend, he can humble himself, he can tabernacle with the broken heart and with the contrite spirit. He can be as the sun to the dewdrop.

What is it that God doth build? "The Lord doth build Jerusalem"; not a local term, as we now interpret it, but a city of peace, a city of completeness, a holy city, beautiful for situation, yea, and making every situation beautiful. Whatever comes within the lines of the Jerusalem of God is made beautiful by that very presence. The earth is beautiful because the tabernacle of God is with men. The earth has looked lovely ever since it grew that flower called the Cross. The earth has been consecrated since Bethlehem was made as the greatest

of the cities. The Lord is not building up some questionable place, a place of moral ambiguity, some doubtful hut ; he builds the city of peace, the Zion of holiness, the metropolis of purity and light. Why do we not allow God to build ? Although we cannot thwart his purpose, we can incline our will against it. If we cannot throw down Jerusalem, we can at least try to do so. That is our wickedness—what we would do if we could. We should sympathise with all the constructive and conservative aspects of the divine government,—keeping together, building up, preserving, protecting, securing. That is the very ministry of love.

“He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.” He does not want anybody to be outside ; he would not have one prodigal son in all his universe. The further we have gone astray the more welcome we are when we come home. Let no man henceforward call himself an outcast in any sense that means fatality or finality, so that there can be no recovery for his soul. I know not who may not be saved ; I know that the prodigal son has been welcomed ; I know that the kingdom of heaven has been opened to souls that no social door would open to ; I know that the grace of God has conquered the worst condition of the human soul. Then why despair ? Why say you are outcast and cannot be brought in ? If you are saying so merely to attract attention to yourselves, then your complaint is not religious, but impious. If you are saying so because of your heart’s pain, real, honest pain, from this moment hear the sweet gospel. There is not a soul of man that need be an outcast from the bounty of the grace of God. There would be no gospel in all the revelation to my soul if it excluded or modified this music. If God could willingly appoint any man to be

an outcast, and then sentence him to everlasting darkness because he was not a child at home, he would to me be no longer God. My soul feels that God is love: love always tries how many it can bring in, not how many it can keep out. Love always thinks that we can make room for another. That is the very nature of love. Jealousy, envy, selfishness, worldliness, these poor house-keepers say, Enough, enough! no matter who hungers or thirsts, close the door, seal the record, enough! Love's quick, generous eye seems to say in its very benevolence, We could do with more; if there is another outcast, go and welcome him; tell him that if we have not calculated for him arithmetically, we have calculated for him sympathetically, and somebody will share a seat with him. A Gospel to be benevolent, inclusive, generous, must have come from a larger sphere than earth, must have been born in Bethlehem of Judæa.

The Lord does still more on the line of constructiveness: "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Not only the broken in health, the broken in fortune, the broken in hope; the Lord goes to the root and core of the matter, and binds up the broken in heart. O man, it is the heart that is wrong! "Out of the heart are the issues of life"; "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." The condition of the heart determines the quality of the character. Why seek reform, except as an initial step, an alphabetic morality? Why seek partial amendment? What we want is a new heart. That is the very thing which God in Christ proposes to give us. Not a new theory, a new economy of life, a new speculation, a new hand, but a new heart. All the works will be new because the worker himself is renewed. See then, how busy is the Lord! "The Lord doth build up

Jerusalem." Anything more? "He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel." Aught more? "He healeth the broken in heart." Aught more? "And bindeth up their wounds."

Meantime, does he let his universe take care of itself? Has he wound up the great clock of the constellations, and is he letting it fall down, striking its centuries and its æons, and then expiring at a dead point? No. Hear how the music rolls: "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names." One would think that if he were busy building, and gathering together, and healing the broken in heart, and binding up their wounds, he would have no time to attend to the framework of the universe. Yet here is the distinct declaration that the universe is taken care of at every point. There is not one little wicket-gate that opens into the meadow of the stars that is not angel-guarded. God hath no postern gates that the thief can enter undiscovered. The word "telleth" is a singular word; what is it when reduced to the level of our mother tongue? "He telleth" is equal to "He numbereth"; he looketh night after night to see that every one is there. We have sometimes heard the shepherd muttering to himself as the sheep came home in the gloaming—one, two, three, four. Why this enumeration? Because he has so many, and he must know whether every one is at home or not. What does one matter in fifty? Everything. It is the missing one that makes the heart ache; it is the one thing wanting that reduces wealth to poverty; it is the one anxiety that drives our sleep away. I have a thousand blessings; on that recollection I will fall to slumber. Yet I cannot. Why not? Because of the anxiety, the one pain, the one trouble, the one child lacking, the one friend grieved,

the one life in danger, the one legitimate aspiration imperilled and threatened with disappointment. But I have a thousand blessings : why not pillow my head upon these and rest? I cannot : nature is against me ; reason may have a long argument, but the one anxiety arises and sneers it down. So the Lord telleth, counteth, goeth over the number, as it were, one by one, to see that every little light is kindled, every asteroid at home. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. He makes pets of the stars—he calls them by the names. He treats them as if they were intelligent ; he speaks to them as if they could answer him. And who shall say they cannot answer him? Who knows the eloquence of light, the masonry of silent music, the suggestiveness of infinite movement? Who says the stars cannot speak light to God? It is a sensitive universe. There is more life in it than we have yet contemplated. You cannot put down your foot without crushing life. The whole air lives ; but for the roughness of the hand I might take hold of the robe of an angel. Our instruments are out of fettle, having lost edge and delicacy and expressiveness. These hands, which we think can touch the fairest thing without doing mischief, are rough and rude and cruel in their gentlest touch. If our souls had fingers they would find the air thronged with holy ones. Then we may rest in safety, because God is Sovereign, and God is taking care of everything. God is the builder, God is the doctor, God is the friend, God is the economist : builder, he is building Jerusalem ; doctor, he is healing the broken in heart ; economist, he telleth the tale of the stars, to see that not one is missing—yea, he calleth them all by name, and we do not know them. We have called the stars by names of our own. We have a long list of names of planets ; we commit them to memory and forget them. What God's

names are we cannot tell ; one day we may hear him calling to the stars, and calling them each by its respective name. Better live in this high poetry that gives life to everything, than live in the low materialism which debases and depletes everything, tears the white robe from the shoulders of the universe, and leaves it a naked and desolate and orphaned creation.

Then all is peace, all is quietness, all is progress ? No. There is one more thing the Lord doeth, and that must not be omitted. The evening and the morning make the day ; when you are counting your day you must not omit the darkness. What is this dark thing that God doeth ? Why, it is but an aspect of all the bright things he is working out : " He casteth the wicked down to the ground." He will have no wickedness. Wickedness is want of truthfulness, want of sympathy with righteousness, want of proportion ; wickedness is baseness of every quality. Wickedness cannot sing ; wickedness is eternally hoarse when it tries to utter the psalm of adoration. Wickedness spoils the garden, silences the music, affrights the child, drives away all youth and loveliness : wickedness makes hell.

Out of all this delineation comes the whole New Testament issue. The God that builds Jerusalem must build something larger, or Jerusalem must be taken as the type of something infinitely grander than any city upon earth. When God gathers together the outcasts of Israel he is beginning to gather in the nations, black and white, far and near ; the men of a rough tongue and a fierce countenance, the great empire and the isles that jewel the sea. When God heals the broken in heart it means that he is coming with a great salvation to the spirit, to redeem the world with blood. All these providential disclosures

of the divine nature point to the redemptive issue. We cannot rest in providence ; or, if we rest in providence, it is because we construe providence into its largest meanings. Salvation is providence ; the Cross is part of the economy of God. It is because he would not lose one star, one child, one heart, that he sets up the Cross and glorifies it. In all these matters we cease to be agnostic ; here we have knowledge, because here we have truth of the divine presence and the divine sovereignty. Every man must be his own theistic argument. If your theism, or belief in God, is derived from a book, the book may be stolen, the argument may be forgotten ; but if God has wrought himself into the very constitution of your soul, and has been present with you in all the evolution and in all the sorrow and joy of life, if you have seen him at the wedding, if he has been with you at the burial, if he has spoken to you in the night-time and been near you at midday,—then the argument is part of your very individuality, and no man can take it away. Let us cry for this knowledge of God. As for his majesty, his essential light, his essential life ; as for the cherubim and seraphim, those expressive symbols of essential being ; there we know nothing, and at present nothing is all we can know ; but we leave the higher levels to be explored when we have passed the river which we call Death. Meanwhile, we know the Lord as builder, healer, economist, as One who lifts up the afflicted ; and in a thousand instances we have seen that hand of his closed in judgment and smiting the wicked to the earth. Are you cast down ? The Lord lifteth up, he lifteth up gently ; he so identifies himself with you that in lifting you up he seems to be lifting himself up ; it is an uplifting wrought in you rather than from outside of you. Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Praise

the Lord, O Jerusalem ; praise thy God, O Zion. Do not be ashamed of your God ; but adore him, praise him, obey him ; and know that now there is no God that can fill the whole need of life but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom be the Hallelujahs of all worlds through all duration !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would be called by thyself to thyself morning, noon, and night. We would not live one day without God; for then should we be without hope in the world, without joy, without rest. When we live and move and have our being in God our hearts are tranquil, our eyes are bright with holy expectation. May we never try to live by ourselves for our own purposes; may we ever live in the spirit of consecration, which is the spirit of love—yea, the spirit of the Cross of Christ. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done. Still thou dost spare our life; even yet thou dost send forth thy Gospel to us; we remain on praying-ground; we therefore still have hope in the Cross. How great its love! yea, how marvellous in tenderness! how infinite in scope! Herein is love, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. For a righteous man no one would die, but Christ died for us when we were unrighteous, far away from God, outcast, lost because of sin. When we thought he could not have come after such as we are, he said, The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Then did we know our name, and realise our condition, and answer his pleading love. Fill us with thy Spirit, O Holy One; Lord, abide with us thy very self; Father, forsake us not: then shall we find flowers in the wilderness and pools of water in the burning sand. Amen.

VIII.

BY NIGHT.

“And he called for Moses and Aaron by night.”—EXOD. xii. 31.

“AT midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that

was in the dungeon ; and all the firstborn of cattle." A marvellous, a tremendous discrimination ! We think the showers of God's arrows will hit every one ; the tempest blows so roughly and the shower of fire is so infinite that no one can escape. It is not so. In the crowd God strikes down the man he has in view ; he knows the member of the family upon whom to lay the lacerating thong. He is not a God of generalities, he is a God of particulars and discrimination and searching criticism ; he is like his word, which is a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. There is nothing indiscriminate in divine judgment. The coward must not flee to the crowd thinking that he will escape : all the fires of God will focus themselves upon his rebellious head. All this took place at midnight. Pharaoh did not wait until the morning. Some prayers have to be offered in haste ; some commands have no context ; they shoot out of the royal mind and out of the dominating heart instantly, with fierce suddenness. We cannot always gather ourselves into an attitude of composure, and then begin to think in intellectual tranquillity what we shall say and do. Sometimes events are startled out of us. We did not know an hour ago what we were going to do ; we have surprised ourselves, we have been present at a new revelation, we have been touched with the sting of fire, and our blood has answered the appeal in hot haste.

We may accommodate the text and enlarge it, so as to take in many a thought that is practically useful and beneficent. Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron by night. Where now your etiquette, your ceremony, your appointed hours for interchange of visits ? Where now your cold blood ? Doctors are called up at night-time, so are men

gifted with the genius of religious consolation, trustees of the wealth of sympathy. God is summoned at midnight. Our life is not one long day. Have we made any provision for the night-time? Our religion should be at least as large as our life. It is just at that point that all other religions beside the religion of Christ go down. Is it not a contention suggested and supported by the strongest reason that our religion should be at least as large as our life? How large is our life? Who has seen it? What surveyor has gone forth with chain and field-book and taken in all the rugged country of life? Not one. Every man has his own estimate, every man has seen his own ghost, trembled under the action of his own tragedy, smiled at his own frivolity, felt the touch of inexpressible and incommunicable agony. By the size of your religion I will, if you please, estimate your measurement of your own life. Produce your religion, produce your faith; if it is a little faith, quite a narrow and easily measurable religion, then that is the estimate you have placed upon your life. With you life is a surface, life is a mere line, life is without cubic richness and mystery; life is a dance, a glee, a song, a merriment, a feast, hot, smoking, perishing in the using. You may well have a little faith, a small, dwindling, hardly visible religion. A body an inch high does not require many garments or very long ones: a life that is set out on such mean lines can have no need of prayer, cannot turn back its head that it may look upon the burning stars,—it might nestle in a dock-leaf; it might find all the paradise it wants at the root of some weed. But given another conception or another experience of life: let us hear the man who has seen life in something like its largeness and mystery and wonder and pain. Let the man of hoary hairs stand up and tell us what he knows of life. If he have no gift of words, if he will but supply

us the hints we will find the language. What sorrow, what tears, what disappointment, what crushed ambition, what foiled hope, what befooled endeavour! how many speculations broken in two, how many calls away to dig a grave where we expected to found a monument! how often have we been caught even in the summer-time in great rains for which we have made no provision! Hear him; he knows life: will some little theory do for him? will some ingenious hypothesis of the outward universe be all the religion he wants? He calls for something larger, deeper, more after the scope of his own life. A big life cannot do with a little religion. If life were one long summer day we could have our religion like so many pleasant flowers round about us, to be looked at and to inhale their fragrance now and again. If life were everlasting youth we should want much laughter and glee, enjoyment under any name and in any shape. Youth loves the sunshine. The little lambs lie down on the sunny slopes. If life were one long night we could arrange our religion accordingly; we could be pensive, melancholy, funereal. But life is more or less of all these,—a wondrous intermixture: laughter breaking in upon prayer; the clash of funeral bells mingling with the clash of wedding metal; the song interrupted by a sob. It is a curious life; quite a cubic quantity, having length, breadth, depth, height. If it were a line we could satisfy it with a waving of the hand, but when it goes down so far and up so far, and has in it unpenetrated secrets, we want a religion that will cover the whole space.

Pharaoh answered the suggestion of necessity. When the firstborn of the empire were dead, and the firstborn of the cattle were slain, and the night was one great

cloud of judgment, Pharaoh said, Send for the ministers, send for the religious men, send for the leaders of the people, send for Moses and Aaron. Ministers are the most wanted when the night is darkest. We smile at them in the June sunshine; we think they are rather weak; we broadly suggest that they have nothing to do with the affairs of life, and they are not to be consulted in times of real commercial prosperity. They are very well in their place; they are respectable persons with a strong dash of inferiority of some kind about their judgment. We have known ministers kept out of the house when there was a wedding in it, and they were glad to be spared the transient frivolity, for in such houses the wedding was no sacrament: we have known them sent for to the same houses when death was there; it seemed to be a composition with death; there was more or less of accommodation to circumstances and tribute to custom and respectability. We shall want great men some time. They have balm for healing, they have words all music, and if they be not mere officers, but real brothers, downright honest, sensible, good men, they will take hold of life reverently, and will know how to conduct it into the presence of the King.

Such men should be our best leaders, our truest teachers. But Pharaoh was in haste; he would have sent for any one who could rid him of the presence of the children of Israel. His was a selfish consideration, and a selfish appeal, and a selfish policy. The policy of Pharaoh was never anything else: a policy of aggrandisement, a policy of spirited progress. Anything that would add to his dignity and glory was welcome to the king of Egypt. Now said he, "Be gone!" If he had said that only, he would not have been touched by the tragedy of the

occasion ; let us be just even to pagan kings. Pharaoh said more ; he became human on that occasion. Great, startling events do reveal us to ourselves. Said Pharaoh, "Be gone" ; and then he added, "and bless me also." He was almost a worshipper. He felt that these men represented the God of blessing, the very fount and throne of benediction. How is it that we feel about some men that they have the gift of blessing us ? It is something in the countenance, or in the voice, or in the touch, or in the manner ; something in the atmosphere and tone of the men which assures us that if we would but lovingly touch them, we should be stronger ourselves for that contact. Here is the mystery of spirit. This is more than magnetism. Many persons would be so content if they could reduce religion to an aspect of magnetic force. They will have anything but inspiration. If you could call it genius, they would be grateful to you ; if you could translate "sympathy" into "magnetic action" it would greatly relieve their souls ; but when you talk about God, eternity, the soul, spiritual growth, the mystery of spiritual action, they are afraid. They would run away from you that they might escape a noise terrible as thunder at midnight. The visitation of the children of Egypt on this occasion was rendered the more memorable and the more painful by its occurring during the night-time. "At midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt." Darkness is his pavilion. Darkness is one of the sanctuaries of God. We cannot measure darkness ; we do not know where it begins or where it ends ; we dare not go out in the intense darkness because we should stumble or fall, or we should become the prey of evil men. Appeals often depend upon atmosphere. Many a sermon preached under certain circumstances fails of effect ; whereas the very same sermon would be powerful

and searching and useful if the circumstances of the hearer were correspondent. Let a man come to the house of God in real necessity, and he will get bread ; let a man come to the house of God filled with selfish gratulation and mere intellectual excitement, and he will get very little. It is when we are emptiest that we realise the fulness of God ; it is when we are little that we are great ; when we are weak, we are strong. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled." So God needs the night. He works wonders in the darkness. All nature is busy even at night-time. There is a population of the night. There are cities of darkness, nations of gloom, with the metropolis and the provinces, and all the secret communications, the appeals and all the various instrumentalities and agencies of constructed society. The universe is not a patch of light or a cloud of darkness ; it is both, and all infinitely exceeding our imagination to conceive or to express it.

If we may make a strictly religious application of these words, what about the conversions that are wrought at night-time ? They are just as sound, or may be just as sound, as the conversions wrought in the daylight. The conversation which Nicodemus had with Jesus Christ was just as full of interest in the night as if it had occurred during the brightest summer day. Nay, some things are better at night than in the morning. There are low tones that ought to be spoken in the darkness. There are tones of music which must be studied and uttered in exquisite consideration in the chamber of sickness. A man must not use all his voice when he is speaking to those who are appointed to die. There are times when the song may be as the fulness of the sea when it breaks upon the shore, and there are other times when the song

must be almost a dying cadence. Sorrow must not be violently handled. Jesus Christ adapted his tone to the night-time in which he talked with Nicodemus. It was the same philosophy, the same mystery of birth and issue, the same Gospel of origin and newness of hope, but all so spoken that the night halted to catch the ineffable strain. If you have been converted in sorrow your conversion may be quite sound. Do not say, I was driven to God and to prayer in a spirit of fear or of panic, and therefore I doubt the reality and soundness of my spiritual relationship. What about your life, your sacrifice, your love, your charity? Do you endure well? Are you envious, spiteful, bitter? or are you gentle, kindly, loving, sympathetic, co-operative? Do not let us determine the reality or validity of your conversion by certain local and temporary circumstances, but by the life. And now you have the right standard of judgment. If your life answer the great conditions imposed by Jesus Christ, have no longer any doubt about the validity of your conversion; but if your head only is filled with a little set of notions, a small series of religious propositions which you learnt from a man who did not understand them, and if your life be correspondingly formal, barren, and measurable, then I care not whether you were avowedly converted by night or by day, because you have not been converted at all. Some persons think that because they learn certain little things which they could enumerate one by one,—as, the fall of man, the gift of Christ, the destiny of the wicked,—and if they give intellectual assent to these, they need pay no further attention to anything religious. You may believe intellectually everything that is in the Bible, and know nothing about spiritual regeneration. On the other hand, you may be intellectually very poor and small, you may hardly be able to write your own name, and

yet you may have such an experience of divine things that you would not give up your secret joy of heart for all the diamonds of the world. So I do not ask you to consider whether you were converted in the night-time or in the day-time, whether through a spirit of love or through a spirit of fear: the great question is, How did the morning find you? How does the daylight occupy you? And if you now be sincere, simple, loving, helpful to others, a blessing in the house, then you are a child of the living God.

May I resort to the old preachers' plan, the good old plan of Bunyan and Baxter, the plan of the puritan apostles, and pleaders? We might do worse than revive their methods. If I might be permitted to go back and assume this old fashion of the pulpit, I should say, Do not put off sending for Christian friend or instruction or help until night. I would say, Think of the beautiful idea of giving a whole life to God! You are under twenty. If you could now say, By the grace of God I will follow the right, I will study Christ and keep company with him and his apostles, in the hope that I may learn the way to pardon and to peace, you might live fifty years, even sixty years, longer, and give every one of the years to the Cross. On the other hand, let me send none away despairing. If some poor old broken life is now-saying, I have wasted all my opportunities, I am westering towards seventy; what shall I do? You may return, you may pray, you may begin just now. Let us have the last of your years. We never now can get the first; all the bloom-time has gone. We can never invite Christ to look upon the blossoms and promises of your life; but he is so much the Christ, so really and truly the Son of God, that he will come into you at your old age and make

you young again. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

Pharaoh was under the influence of fear. We must not expel fear from the Christian ministry. Fear has a useful part to work. If I had it in my power to bring men in either by love or by fear, I should say, Let me use the instrumentality of love; I will never mention darkness or hell, perdition or ruin. But if I can only get a soul in by preaching the gloomy aspect of life and futurity, then I will unveil that aspect, and be as poignant in my descriptions of it as I possibly can. Do not run away from the ministry that is a ministry of fear, saying it is a ministry of coercion and compulsion and threatening. That ministry alone can reach a certain kind and quality of life. On the other hand, if you respond to love, here is love—on Calvary, in the Cross, in the crucifixion, in the whole priesthood of God the Son. Therefore you have two appeals addressed to you: love sings, judgment denounces. The purpose of each is the same—to bring men to the living God. Send by night or send by day, send in poverty or in prosperity, it is the prerogative of Christ, the majesty of Messiah, to go whenever, wherever, he is sent for by the heart.

IX.

WHAT CHRIST DID.

WHAT did Jesus Christ do for men that men could not have done for themselves?

This question, though so simple to all appearance, is really the summing up of nearly all the vital questions that the mind of man can ask. I am not sure that you will not be misled even by the word "men" as it stands in the inquiry. You will think of two men, three men, or of some other limited number of men; and if you do so, you will miss the point of Christ's whole work. Christ may have done something for two men which the two men could not have done for themselves, and yet not have done anything which another man might not have done as well; and may, indeed, not have been equal to the men for whom he did it. A child may open a door for a giant. So long as you think of numbers you will not see either what Christ did or why he did it. Suppose, then, we take the word "men" out of the inquiry, and put the word man in its place, the question will then stand thus: What did Christ do for man that man could not have done for himself? Mark what a change is made by this new word. It suggests or implies that Christ is in some sense outside of human nature, or apart from it; not wholly or exclusively in it, else his work would be something done not for human nature, but by it; because if he were only and merely a man himself, whatever he

did man did. Yet Christ was a man—more, if you can prove it, but a man certainly. He looked like one; he acted like one; he was, in fact, a man. If it could be shown that he was not a man, all that is tender in sympathy and helpful in fellowship would be taken out of his life at once. But if he did something (anything) for man which man could not have done for himself, then he had the power of separating himself, at some point and for some time, from the race of which he was a member. But to separate himself from the race of which he was a member was impossible if he was only and merely a man. No other man has done so; no other man is doing so, or can do so, now. If, on the other hand, he was only and merely a man, he must have been greater than the sum-total of men—*i.e.*, humanity,—or he could not have been equal to his task. But to be greater than the sum total of men, and yet to have been only and merely a man, is a contradiction in terms and a grotesque exaggeration. If Jesus Christ did something for man which man could have done for himself, he departed from the whole course of Providence, and did so for no sufficient reason. In what other instance has God done anything for us that he meant us to do for ourselves? It is often pointed out as characteristic of God's method that he calls upon the ability of man to the furthest extent, and that it is only where man's power ends that God's power comes into operation; and hence we have the common saying that "man's extremity is God's opportunity." It is when there is no eye to pity and no arm to save, that God's eye pities and God's arm brings salvation. It will be strange, then, if in one case he has altered the whole scheme of his government; so strange, indeed, that we shall find it easier to believe in the continuity and oneness of his method than to force the mind to believe that he created

a precedent which goes against the whole bent and stress of his own plan as shown in the Bible and in general history. It will be strange, too, and something more, if man wrought out the idea and scheme of his own salvation, and God denied him the credit of having done so. Put your hand upon one verse in the whole Bible that gives man the credit of having saved himself. If he did save himself, God will not be slow to give him the "well done" which is due to a deed so great. Again and again men are praised and blessed by God and his Son for having done this and that good thing, as for doubling the talents, giving money liberally and cheerfully, and for all acts of Christian hospitality and service. The principle, therefore, is recognised and applied ; so I am not asking you to create a principle, but to act upon one which God has sanctioned, when I call upon you to quote a single verse or line in which man is credited with having saved himself. But if Christ was only and merely a man, he could not have done anything above the reach of man. How sublime and wondrous soever the deeds which he did, they were but human power seen at its best, human power flowering and blooming in the height of perfect summer. So much so, that all men would be entitled to say, Do not look at us if you want to know really what man is : we are withered and broken ; we have marred and shattered our best selves ; but look at that man called Christ, who has taken care of himself and is a perfect specimen of our race. Or, to change the illustration : Christ was only the strongest man amongst us, who by sheer hardness and perseverance found his way to the hilltop first, and was kindly pointing feeble followers to his footsteps, telling them, in a bland and cheerful voice, to rest here and take hold there, and that he would wait until they got as high as he was himself. I want man to

have the credit of doing this. I will not insist upon having an effusive and sensational approbation, but a calm, fair, honest recognition of keen insight and great executive ability. There ought to be at least one verse which plainly says : Man saved himself ; man saved himself by finding out a way to the enjoyment and assurance of God's pardon, and herein is a proof of man's greatness and glory ; he lost himself for a moment, but he recovered himself for ever. Find one such verse if you can. Having found such a verse, we shall have to cancel or invert many other passages. Wherever a hallelujah is given to the Almighty for having saved us, or praise is given to the Lamb of God as if he were other and more than human, we must amend the morality and withdraw the undeserved and misapplied ascription. And more than this must be done, so much more that most of the Bible will have to be re-written ; especially all those passages in which we are expressly forbidden, with the poignant emphasis of infinite jealousy, to thank ourselves for our spiritual deliverance and safety. The Bible is written upon the principle that self-gratulation is sinful. As soon as man begins to praise himself, his self-approval is written against him as an additional and grievous charge. So, though man delivered himself, through the agency of his supreme specimen, he must say that he had nothing to do with his own deliverance and sanctification !

In looking further into this matter, I must ask you to mark exactly what it is to do something for human nature which human nature could not have done for itself. You remember that Archimedes wanted a standing-place just outside the earth, room enough for a fulcrum and a lever, and then he could move the globe. Whether he could or not we shall never know, for the standing-place could not

be secured ; but it would be easy to find a footing a little way from the earth compared with the task which a man would assume if he undertook to separate himself from his race far enough to be able to do something for human nature which human nature could not do for itself. An impossible task ! For if he accomplished it, the credit would be due to human nature still : it was human nature that got away from itself ; it was human nature that laid the fulcrum and worked the lever ; and yet human nature is to have neither recognition nor credit in the matter ! Of course you will say that there was divine suggestion or inspiration, without which the deed could not have been done. But the answer is unequal to the occasion. Of course there was divine suggestion, but just as certainly there was human execution ; and if we are to spend our immortality in thanking God for the one, surely he might now and again praise us for having accomplished the other. There is no reason why the architect should not praise the builder. Besides, God does recognise and admire and reward certain particular deeds, but never does he admit that we had any share in originating the life out of which they came. But we must have had some share in it if Christ was only and merely one of ourselves, however highly and perfectly he was inspired. Christ, indeed, is the Supreme Mystery, account for his personality and ministry as we may ; a mystery if he came down from Godhead, but an infinitely greater mystery if, being only and merely a man, he so far escaped, or even appeared to escape, the limits of manhood as to give multitudes of sedate and highly cultivated people the impression that he was making himself equal with God. Why, this, I pray you to remember, was the very thing which led to the sin of man. He was told that if he took of the fruit of the tree that was in the midst of the garden he

would be "as gods"! The Second Adam is apparently going to repeat the fatal mistake. He is about to be as God! And he was guilty of the first Adam's sin, with aggravations which made it unpardonable, if he did not, in terms which could not admit of two meanings, utterly repudiate and denounce every claim to be more than only and merely a man. He was more bound to do this than was any other person, because he had undoubtedly given occasion for the suspicion that he did claim to be more than human. He ought, as an act of religious duty, to have begun every day's work with the distinct denial of superhuman claims; a herald should have gone before him to call for silence that he might the more impressively have told the people that, with the warnful experience of the first Adam before him, who wished to escape the limits of his own genius and be as a god, he himself was a man only, one of the common people, having beginning of days and end of life, and that to think of him as other than man was to blaspheme against God. Whether he did thus release himself from the openly-avowed suspicion of alleging superhuman claims, let any reader of his life declare. It is not enough to show that here and there he was weary, hungry, and faint, like other men, nor that he called himself the Son of man; there is no difficulty upon that side of the question, nor is there the slightest doubt of his humanity. What he was bound to do, if only and merely a man, was to dissolve and for ever dissipate all mystery upon the other side of the question, so that we could, so to speak, see all around him, and be able to declare that there was not so much as a threadlet more in his relationships to God than in our own. Now nowhere does Jesus Christ put himself on a level with other men. Nowhere does he say, I am as weak and as ignorant as you are, we must therefore help one another. Nowhere

does he say that his miracles were like other miracles not wrought by himself. On the contrary, looking at his wonderful deeds, he says they are works which none other man did! Moses said that he stammered; Jeremiah said that he was a child; John the Baptist said that he was only a voice: but not one word of self-depreciation did Christ utter; he said he was greater than Solomon, greater than Jonah, greater than all that had ever gone before him, and that he would judge the world!

I have elsewhere* attempted to outline an argument in favour of Jesus Christ's proper Godhead, and I now refer to the subject thus briefly to point out that the following arguments all take for granted that he was "equal with God," "God with us," One with the Father, and Heir of all things, our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. The only question I have to ask is, What did Christ do for men that men could not have done for themselves? A preliminary word will be useful here. It is common to suppose that whatever else a man does or does not know he certainly knows himself. In opposition to this doctrine I maintain that "himself" is exactly the thing which man does not know. He knows some things about himself; he knows his symptoms and he knows his wishes, but "himself," in the inner and essential quality of his being, he does not know. This is at all events presumptively true, viewed in relation to two facts about which there is no dispute. Take the fact of continual surprise in the matter of self-revelation. You often say that you are a wonder to yourself. New dangers awaken new powers; part of you seems to be at the front of the ship doing usual duty at usual times, and part of you is in the hinder part of the ship asleep on a pillow, and that other part you rouse from

* In "Ecce Deus."

slumber when the wind heightens and the sea threatens your life. You say again and again that the thing you feared most you have been able to overcome. You wonder how you survived this or that trial, the keen sorrow, the agony extreme, the darkness that shut out not the stars only, but the great firmament which you thought nothing but light could ever fill ; and yet there you stand stunned, with wonder solemn enough to be religious. You tell how the thought came just in time ; how endurance increased with the demand that was made upon it ; how you began to triumph exceedingly at the very point where you expected to fall, and how it was given you in the hour of fear what you should say to men who had no conscience and no shame. Think of the meaning of all this. You see how you have been developed by circumstances, how when the darkness fell you learned how to pray, how when the sunlight smote your life in loving salute you began to sing for joy, and how when death stared you in the face you were made strong enough to despoil his cruel power : all this you did not foresee ; it came upon you like a revelation, it showed you that in the deepest sense you did not know yourself. In addition to this, take the second undisputed fact—namely, that all judgment considered sound and reliable comes from without, from above ! Who pronounces upon the merits of the picture, the artist or the critic ? Who assigns the value of the book, the writer or the reader ? I do not mean any critic or any reader, but the ideal critic and the ideal reader, or the nearest approximation to either ; in a word, I mean that judgment or revelation must come from above. Jesus Christ often uses this wonderful word above as signifying other and more than mere height, as having, in fact, great spiritual meanings and suggestions. In this sense it is always from “above” that we receive the just judgment

of ourselves. Angelo may be wrong when he says that this or that amateur will never excel in sculpture ; still, Angelo had a right to speak, and if he had been higher still his right would have been more complete. It was not because he was from above, but because he was not sufficiently from above, that he erred in his estimate of the aspirant. We cannot completely judge ourselves personally unless we have help from without. You can see your limbs, but can you see your eyes? You can see your feet, but can you see your head? Not without external help. We can see our actions, but can we see our motives? We can see our relationships to other people, but can we see our essential nature, those energies yet unexpressed, those qualities which will yet surprise us? If I say that you must be told what you are or you will never know, you may find it hard to admit this, because as a matter of fact you have already been told what you are, and you cannot now easily, if at all, distinguish between that which has been revealed to you and that which seems to be the product of your own consciousness, which is part and parcel of your very being. You think you always knew it, and that, in fact, you could not help knowing it. Now, unless we can get rid of this prejudice it is simply useless to go further. If you like you can build up a theory, a philosophy, or a speculation, beyond Christian limits ; you may call it neology, or secularism, what you please (for there is a large choice of fine words) ; but you must not be surprised if Christian examiners should question your right to the possession of some of the materials which you may be using. They may say this is Christ's and so is that, and may insist upon reclaiming elements and principles which you have unconsciously stolen. On the other hand, if you wish to build a theory or philosophy of life within Christian limits,

the very first thing you will have to do is to put off the sandals from off your feet, and sit down in childlike distrust and modesty to be told everything from the very beginning—that is, everything that is essential and eternal. You know by the exercise of your senses something about appearances, relationships, distances, and colours ; but things essential and eternal you do not know, and you must feel that you do not know them. The heart must be brought to say, I do not know myself exactly as I am. I am a mystery to myself. Now and then there is light, but it closes almost instantly in darkness. Tell me what I am ; show me to myself. If you come in this spirit you will learn of Christ. Understand, however, what this spirit means. It is not implied that you are either wholly ignorant or wholly incapable of forming an opinion as to the truthfulness of any revelation that may be made to you. You are not wholly ignorant ; you know a good deal about yourself and about your surroundings. Nor are you incapable of forming an opinion as to the correctness of any revelation of yourself to yourself ; you have a verifying faculty, something within which can never be awakened but by the true revelation. A stranger it will not hear, but the voice of the Good Shepherd it knows even in a whisper. I do not say you will believe it ; I merely say that you will know it. Tell me that I am wholly sinless and indisposed to sin, and I know at once that this is not true, and even my vanity is offended by the supposition that I could ever accept so monstrous a flattery. Tell me, on the other hand, that I am wholly corrupt and depraved, and that, strive as I may, I cannot do any good thing ; and I know at once that there are some facts which seem to prove the exact contrary, as, for example, that I give alms to the poor and teach the ignorant. No man can make me believe that these acts

are not good, and if they are good, they overturn the theory of utter corruption and depravity. For a time this reasoning satisfies me. To all appearance it is complete and invincible. But by-and-by Christ asks me why I gave alms to the poor, and yet he does not wait for an answer. Further on he suggests that sometimes good actions (actions relatively good) are done from bad motives. He leaves that statement without application, yet it must abide with me and come up again and again in my thinkings. Later on still he holds a keen, gleaming light over the action I thought so beautiful; the light pierces it, fills it, shows it just as it is, until I begin to question whether it is really so beautiful as I first thought it. Then I modify my boasting, then I am not eager to claim the deed as mine, then I am ashamed that I ever mentioned it to him, and, last of all, I bow down myself and say, Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man! Every man must see that light for himself, for nothing that he can hear about it will give him an idea of its infinite lustre. So we come back to the fact that we must be told what we are, and told from above, and if we will not receive the light, we must walk in the uncertain and insufficient glimmering of a fire kindled by our own hand.

The way in which the Bible treats men is most instructive. Everywhere it treats me as a sufferer requiring vital remedies. I resent this, and allege in self-defence that I give alms to the poor and teach the ignorant. The Bible is not moved by my resentment; it proceeds calmly to tell me that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," and that as a matter of fact I am "dead in trespasses and sins." I am driven mad by such charges, for I give alms to the poor and teach the ignorant! Still, the Bible does not, will not, flatter me.

It says that I am a child of wrath even as others, that I do my alms to be seen of men, and unless I be born again I cannot enter the kingdom of God. No other book treats me so. Other books praise me, and tell me not to let my heart go down, and point out trees here and there whose fruit will open my eyes and make me as a god. The Bible tells me that the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint, and that unless I repent I shall perish. The tone is rude ; it does not conciliate ; it is independent, firm, unchangeable. What authority the Bible has I do not know at this stage of the inquiry ; but it speaks authoritatively. That is something. It may perhaps be trusting to time for its exposition and vindication ! Certainly it tries no wheedling arts or flattering insinuations, but persistently affronts and humbles my pride. If it is an imposition or an exaggeration, there will be no need to employ a great array of destructive talent to argue it down, for it takes the best possible way of making enemies and preparing for itself an indignant and contemptuous rejection. It is as pitiless to our corruption as is a mirror to a leper. Yet so fascinating ! We curse it, and return for one more look. We burn it, and pick the scorched pages from the fire to read the lines that are left, and those lines look up from the hot ashes and tell man that he is a brilliant criminal and a magnificent fool.

Honest critics will surely allow that the Bible was not made to flatter its readers, and its readers know to their joy that whilst no book speaks to them with a candour so cruel, no book speaks with a hope so clear and animating. It tells them plainly that they are dead, and it also tells them as plainly how they may be made to live. It does not modify their wickedness, or in any sense put the best face upon it ; it says that their sins are as scarlet, yet that

they can be made "as white as snow." When we urge that we have been told of other trees better than itself, it replies that we got that intelligence from the devil, who is a liar and was so from the beginning. But, say we, look at these good things which we have done; and it tells us that the very fact of our pointing them out shows that they are not so good as they seem to be. When we demand its authority for this rude, blunt talk, it asks us in return some question which makes us dizzy with bewilderment and causes us to stagger like drunken men. We can turn from the Book if we please, but turning away from it brings no comfort and settles no difficulties. There it is! If we turn our back on the sun, we only see our own shadow for our pains. The standpoint then, is this: I want to be told what I really (not seemingly) am; I cannot find this out for myself, because I am such a contradiction that I pray one day and tell lies the next, and my settled selfishness actually breaks out now and then into bright sparks of generosity: I cannot therefore trust either of these points. I must be told what I am, and told from above. You cannot tell me, because you and I are the same. Even Isaiah can only tell me what he himself has been told, and John and Paul, the men whose keen eyes saw farthest, can do no more. More they do not profess to do. They all say that they received their message, and did not make it up. They are evidently anxious that this should be clearly understood, for who likes to condemn all men in his own poor name, and who would be allowed to go at large if he did so? Moses would not face Pharaoh without a name that would sound well on being uttered, and look well on being figured, as if it had come out of the thunder or had been written by the lightning; Samuel wanted his credentials, as did David and Jeremiah and the mighty Ezekiel; and as each spoke

he said, This word is not mine but his that sent me ; the authority was above. Even Christ said so when he made himself small enough to be taken for a man. The authority was above—always above : far away like the sun, behind the very firmament, in the caves of the wind, in the chambers of the light, in the tabernacles of the thunder ; above, above ! We wanted to know what we are ; we asked to be told ; and now we have the answer. We do not like it ; we do not parade it as a prize or an honour, but we hide it in our hearts, that we may think about it quietly and often. The answer is, that we are dead, dead in sin, and that the breath of our corruption hath gone up before God as a witness against us !

X.

“DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS.”

“Dead in trespasses and sins.”—EPH. ii. 1.

THE Bible tells us that we are dead. If Jesus Christ confirms this account, he will at once take upon himself the severest task. A point of exciting interest thus arises. Either Jesus Christ will go back to the beginning of the Book of Genesis, and address himself to the dead man who has just been thrown out of Eden, or, like an ordinary reformer, he will mingle with his contemporaries, as if his work had reference only to the principles and customs of a particular nation which ought to be set right according to a standard which he would supply. Happily we have not to wait one moment for the satisfaction of our wonder. Boldly, as became his view of the occasion, he said, “I am come that ye might have life.” Thus he boldly went to the dead Adam (man), and assumed—*i.e.* took upon himself—all the difficulties which attach to so desperate a case. What I want you now to admit is that no other man ever made such an offer. You have Moses and the Prophets, search them and see if any one of their number ever rose to such a height and graciousness, even of mere fancy, as to offer life to his fellow men. It will be something gained if you can be brought to admit that this man, Jesus Christ, had at least magnificent conceptions, whether able or unable

to bring them to effect. If I accept the statement that human nature (all appearances to the contrary) is dead, I am bound to admit that this man instantly addressed himself to that appalling fact. Beating about the bush there is none, nor is there any play upon words ; there is frankness, there is simplicity, there is earnestness. I speak purposely as if Christ were a man only. He says, " I am the life ; he that believeth on me hath everlasting life ; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life ; and ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." He calls himself the Resurrection and the Life. You see, therefore, how closely he addresses himself to the very letter of the Bible, and does not seek a brilliant reputation by attempting to do many dazzling but useless things. If he fails to give life he will fail altogether ; though his eloquence brings tears, and his generosity reward him with the admiration and acclaims of all observers, yet if he fail to give what he himself calls life, his ministry will be a disappointment and sorrow to his own heart. This is not so important to us, however, just now, as is the fact that his ability or inability to give life will determine the value and authority of all the claims which he directly and inferentially sets up. It ought to be nothing to us that his words are beautiful, or that his temper is sweet ; these accidents or felicitous characteristics must not divert us from a severe inquiry into his ability to give life ; the one may entitle him to be thought of as an amiable enthusiast, but the other alone can entitle him to be received and worshipped in any proper sense as the Saviour of the world.

He begins peculiarly, yet in a manner most interesting. A consideration of this manner alone ought to beget for him our favourable regard. His method is gradual ; it is

a development, a process moving towards perfection. As I read the life of Christ, I say, This man always begins where he can ; that is, where people will allow him to begin. For example, he sees a sick man, and says unto him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (a question which meant more than was at once apparent). He sees a leper, and cleanses him. "His fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy, and he healed them!" Does this look as if he had come to give men life? It does! And it looks all the more so because he did not cure one kind of disease only, but all kinds ; as if he could touch the spring of life itself and heal it at the source. See, then, how faithful he is to his own word. It is clear that if this Healer had met Adam when he left the garden a dishonoured and shattered man, he would have asked, "Wilt thou be made whole?" And that question would itself have been a revelation to the sufferer ; it would have been as a door opening into a new world. Sometimes a question may change a destiny. As Jesus Christ healed men he uttered words which he did not explain. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." And truly it would seem so to sufferers relieved! The cleansed leper would say, as new life bounded joyously through his veins, So it is! This is heaven! The lunatic restored would say, The kingdom of heaven is at hand ; look at me and believe! You know what it is to be relieved of great pain ; you exclaim, This is heaven! It is hardly an exaggeration. To yourself indeed it is no exaggeration at all. Jesus Christ meant this, and yet he meant infinitely more ; but in meaning infinitely more, he began where alone the people could begin with him. He meant life ;

but they were not then prepared to understand more than health, so he gave them health, the alphabet and earnest of immortality. To Jesus Christ the words, "kingdom of heaven" meant everything true, pure, beautiful, and good ; but the people who heard the words could see only one aspect of this infinite significance

Still Jesus Christ went on, with sweet and wonderful patience, with both his works and his doctrine. Many a beautiful speech he made, yet his words perplexed the people, and sometimes made them question his sanity. They thought he was a good worker, but when he began to say some of his deepest things to them, they told him that he was mad and had a devil ! We ourselves know what it is for a man to be almost a sage on one side of his life, and almost a fool on another. We know men who, when flying on the wings of fancy, can sing high in the air some song which they have certainly heard in heaven, yet when they come to their feet again, their whole attitude, speech, and personality are hardly above being despicable in feebleness and absurdity. When the people looked at Christ's works, they said, "He hath done all things well." The mother blessed him for blessing her child, but when he began to speak of his glory and his kingdom, his heavenliness and love of truth, she exclaimed in painful surprise, "What is this that he saith ? I cannot tell what he saith." Jesus did not cease talking on this account. It is not always the best preaching that is fully comprehended without attention or mental strain, yet there must be something in it that shall hold all men as by a spell ; or there must be something in the preacher that shall give hope that, when all is explained, it will be found to be a true and glorious doctrine. Something of that kind there was undoubtedly in and around the spoken

word of Christ, for the common people heard him gladly, and wise men looked on with wonder that sometimes moved towards worship and sometimes darkened towards distrust and abhorrence. Notwithstanding the ever-changing and uncertain state of feeling on the part of observers and hearers, attention was never allowed to flag. This was enough in the meantime. He gains much who gains attention. It is to the expectant heart that great messages are delivered. Jesus Christ was so far satisfied that his works and sayings should be quietly accepted, as to desire expressly, and even with much warmth of feeling, that people would not say anything about them for a while. Observe this, if you please. Jesus Christ said again and again, Do not report this; tell no man until the Son of man be risen from the dead. He wished to guard himself from half-stories and partial statements, and yet to give the assurance that the time would come when all the world might be told everything he had ever said and done. God took care to have the whole world ready before he made man; but Christ could not repeat this divine wisdom: he had to do much of his work piece by piece, openly in the plain daylight, with throngs of people looking on and questioning him. But he took occasion, when circumstances were favourable, to do in the part what he would have done in the whole had it been possible—namely, to impose silence until there was something complete and self-explaining to be told. And yet this necessary disclosure of processes was turned to good account. Sentences that were mysterious were lighted up by the final act, and even old prophecies were re-vivified and made lustrous as when the disciples, seeing their Master's devotion, and feeling the rays of His glowing ardour, "remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." In the sunset there

was a light which fell upon things unexplained in the morning, and in the autumn the harvest was given as the explanation of the seed-time labour.

As you read the words of Jesus Christ you will wonder what his mission was precisely. What it was generally, you will gather at once. I question, however, whether you can understand the doctrine until you understand the man. If you plead that you can surely understand words and arguments, I might demur to the justice of your self-flattery, or even strongly deny your claim to a power which seems to be an almost vital part of human nature itself. Possibly you may understand the words of an equal; and even that possibility may be extreme unless by the very fact of your equality you do understand the speaker himself, and see things in a common atmosphere. But how to understand fully a speaker who is not your equal, who is felt to belong to another class, a higher, a better?—that is the question. You would not be surprised if a man spoken of as rich by an agricultural labourer should be described as poor by a millionaire, yet both men speak one language, and both are equally impartial. A hundred other illustrations will occur to you, and will show, what it is here so needful to enforce, that the meaning of words is not so easy as it looks, and that some men must themselves be explained before the complete and final value of their words can be determined. Of all men this seems to me to be pre-eminently true of Jesus Christ. Upon his personality it wholly depends whether some words are blasphemous or holy, absolutely insane or infinitely divine. So there was, of course, continual contention about his words: some said he had a devil; some said He was a teacher sent from God; some said He was Beelzebub; others said he was Elias

or "that prophet." Bear this in mind, and it will help to explain some words, and modify your impatience with the mystery of others. For the son of a carpenter, himself a mechanic and a peasant, to say, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee," was a plain violation of piety and good sense: for the Son of God to say it, might be a gracious and supremely glorious revelation. Mark how the difference turns wholly upon personality; the words are the same, but what of their relative compass and value? I am not about to argue the question of the Incarnation, but to point out that if Jesus Christ was begotten of the Holy Ghost his life, from its very first day, must have a specialty which will communicate its own uniqueness to every word and every act. I ask you, therefore, to allow to Jesus Christ a right which you concede to others, the right of being judged according to his personality. If you walk through the wonderful history of his life according to this common and proper rule of judgment, you will walk in the light and never stumble. But if you determine to crush all his words into the mould of your own capacity, and refuse every meaning to them which would not attach to them in your own use, he will perplex and annoy you in every discourse.

Jesus Christ evidently takes something for granted in his way of addressing mankind. He takes for granted the fact of his Incarnation. He says that he came from above; that God is his Father; that no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. It was this fundamental assumption, that was either denied or not apprehended, which led to endless misconception and controversy. The only person who could have absolutely no doubt as to his heavenly origin was his mother; she alone of all humanity knew this as an

indisputable and awful fact. It will be most interesting, therefore, to get some hint of her estimate of Jesus Christ ; if she would speak but one word, it might help us like a revelation. Happily, she did speak that word, and she spoke it so incidentally as to add much to its pertinence and value in this discussion. At the marriage-feast in Cana of Galilee she and her Son had a brief conversation upon a point which she herself had raised, and in the result she said to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it,"—words which must be admitted to be pregnant with profound and vital meaning. Consider what they imply. For thirty years mother and Son had lived together in seclusion, and no miracle had he publicly done ; for thirty years she had watched his temper, his disposition, and his habits ; all these things she had pondered in her heart, and yet she knew not the whole purpose of a daily growth in beauty and revealed nobleness ; but somehow she felt that in a time of need help would come from him and from him alone, and in one sentence she expressed the conviction, the love, and the religious honour of a lifetime, when she said unto the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Thus the mother unconsciously revealed the Son, and the Son himself seems to have caught the words, and to have immortalised in them his filial love, for long afterwards he said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you !" Both the sentences are full of the spirit of rulership, the mother's not less than the Son's. For years she had been doing his will, not slavishly, but by a sweet and tender compulsion, and so good had she found it, so invariably right, wise, and beneficent, that when she became his first preacher to the world, she summed up her own hitherto undeclared subjection and love in the injunction, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

Observe that Jesus Christ did not speak in what we now term a systematic or methodical manner. In the first chapter of Genesis we see how orderly he could be (for all things were created by him), and in the gospels we see how different is life from mechanism. An orderly or scholastic statement, such as rabbinical hearers would have approved, would have been out of keeping with a mission designed to have universal effects. Every one must hear something which he could understand—a parable or a proverb, a doctrine or a prophecy; there must be a word for the little child, and an allusion which would make the hoary rabbi think. It is, therefore, from a most miscellaneous mass of graphic and vivid talk that you have to pick out and piece together the Speaker's meaning. But this miscellaneousness comes to an end in one subject, the appalling subject of the Speaker's own death and resurrection. We may, by listening to him now, be able to gather something of his intention. To talk of death at little more than thirty years of age! It is unnatural. Can the young spring wither and shed yellow leaves like autumn? Can morning die? Yet Jesus in the early prime of manhood said he must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness! He said he came to give his life a ransom for many; that his flesh was bread, and that his blood was shed for men; that no man took away his life from him, but that he laid it down of himself; and that greater love no man could have than so to lay down his life. He said he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the chief priests and elders, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. When Nicodemus said that he was a teacher come from God, he answered, "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"—not a teacher only,

but a Saviour and giver of life. When Moses and Elias talked with him, it was about the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Instead of talking of kingliness, power, dominion, and glory, he spoke of suffering, rejection, pain, humiliation, and death. Not only, however, did he speak of death, he spoke also of resurrection from the dead, and the disciples reasoned among themselves, wondering what the rising again from the dead could mean. He said that if he was lifted up, he would draw all men unto him, and that some things he would explain, or would be explained, when he rose again from the dead. The principal point he himself did actually explain, in most remarkable terms : "It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations."

This is a rough summary of Christ's work as explained by himself, and is perhaps sufficient as a basis upon which to found some intelligent opinion of its purpose. Note a few points of special significance. First, How easy it would have been to have expressed his object in more direct and positive terms. Thus : Man is immortal ; he is advancing every day towards heaven or hell ; by his own sin he has lost his spiritual life, and is utterly unable to regain it. I am his maker, God manifest in the flesh. I will take all his sins upon me ; I will stand in his stead. Whatever is due to him as a punishment for sin shall fall upon me ; and in this way, after I have returned from the dead, I will become his Saviour and Lord evermore. No such formal statement did Jesus Christ ever attempt to make. He proceeded, apparently, on one of two assumptions, either (1) that people already knew who he was, or (2) that his words and works were such as to leave no

doubt as to his personality, that is, as to its origin and nature. Second, What apparent reason there was for the strong contentions which his ministry occasioned. It is idle to deny that controversy was inevitable. Some questions he would not answer at all, and others he answered in terms whose exclusive sense was at least not obvious. He contradicted the maxims which were approved by teachers held high for their character and office, and substituted for them principles and injunctions so abstract, ideal, and spiritual, as to be apparently quite impracticable in a world like this. The religious teachers of his day he spoke of as blind leaders of the blind, and he told them that they would all fall into the ditch. He visited suspected characters, and sinners that were universally avoided and condemned by religious people. One day he was quite social; the next he was in the desert hiding himself from his own disciples. The people who were most thought of he described as false guides, whited sepulchres, and children of the devil. He was so affectionate as to take up little children in his arms and bless them, and so unloving as to ask coldly who his mother was when he was told that she stood without waiting to see him. No wonder that such a man aroused the most violent controversies and provoked deadly antagonism. Third: How completely, and almost humiliatingly, he kept his disciples in a secondary position. He did not give them to feel that they were elements of strength to him, or that they were necessary to his cause. He said that one of them was a devil; another of them he was always taking aside and reproving; He said to his oldest friend, "Get thee behind me, Satan"; and several of them were but errand-runners and managers of small affairs. When they ventured to express an opinion about him, they were always sure to bring upon them-

selves a severe rebuke, except in one instance wherein the speaker was told that what he had said was not of his own ability or invention, but was a revelation from heaven. They knew not what manner of spirit they were of. They were blamed for turning the children away ; blamed for calling down fire from heaven ; blamed for having no faith ; blamed for rejoicing ; blamed for sleeping. And with all this, never were men so assured of their Master's love ; he comforted them with holy promises ; he drove away the fears that darkened around their souls ; he said they should be princes and judges ; he gave them rest from labour ; and he washed their feet. Fourth : What a high degree of improbability marked his principal assurances and predictions. He had twelve thrones to dispose of. He was before Abraham, and Abraham had rejoiced in his day. His name was to be made known in all nations. He had glory with the Father before the world was. He would build the temple in three days. He would rise again from the dead. If all these assurances had stood alone they would have justified the strongest suspicion and demanded the most determined resentment. No sane men would have founded themselves as a society upon propositions so wild and impious. But they did not stand alone. They were softened by much humanity, and the slope which culminated in heights so sublime was graded by many beautiful deeds and words, by beatitudes and sympathies most tender. And what was grand in prediction was made credible by something equally grand in actions which admitted of no doubt. How otherwise could such men as were the disciples, or indeed any men, have received the prediction of his rising again from the dead ? That prediction alone, separated from the tissue of his whole history, was enough to confound the disciples by its manifest improbability and its profane self-idolatry. But

set in its proper place, surrounded by miracles which seemed to surpass each other in beneficence and splendour, it became one of a number which approached it in sublimity. In such a history as Christ's the resurrection was but a commonplace. There are hills in Europe any one of which, taken alone, would make the fame of an ordinary landscape, but gathered around Mont Blanc they are little heeded ; yet Mont Blanc himself, which would be infinite upon an island like Great Britain, is modified by the very hills which he dwarfs by his appalling stature. The resurrection of Christ was made credible by the resurrection of Lazarus ; the salvation of the world was made probable by the blessing of little children. The preceding acts were but syllables which, when put together, formed the word Resurrection. Lastly, and specially : Observe how often the natural and obvious meaning (or that which would be taken as such) of Christ's words is not the meaning which they were intended to convey. If it may be so expressed, Christ had a way of speaking which must be understood, or the point of many a sentence will be lost. A few examples will show how true this is. When Christ spoke of a leaven, the disciples instantly (and not unnaturally) thought that he meant bread ; but he did not intend the outer meaning to be taken at all, for he spoke not of bread, but of doctrine ! Who at first could have inferred that such was his meaning ? When Christ spoke of living (spring) water to the woman of Samaria, she found out, on asking him for the good gift, that he was not talking of water, but of something of which water was a symbol. How was the woman, of plain matter-of-fact mind, to know that he was using typical language ? She took the first meaning of the words, and in doing so she missed the point of the declaration. Christ told a wise man that we must all be born again ; the wise man took the first

meaning of the words, as did the Samaritan woman, and exclaimed, "How can these things be?" On another occasion Christ said he would give his flesh for the life of the world; like Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria, the Jews took the obvious meaning of the words, and strove among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us his flesh to eat?" He told the disciples that Elias was come already, and he left them to discover that when he said Elias he meant John the Baptist. He told the people that if they would destroy the temple he would build it again in three days; they said (taking the first meaning of the words) that it was impossible, and he left them to find out that he was not talking about the temple at all, but about his body! Again and again he said to his disciples, "How is it that ye do not understand?" They always took his words literally; they did not see the soul within the body; and thus, even far on in their training, they were justly described as "fools and slow of heart." If you put all those instances together, and quite a number of others that will occur to your own recollection, you will see what I mean in saying that Christ had a way of speaking, a genius, which must be taken as the key of particular passages, if you are really and usefully to grasp the meaning of his living words. Understand that his words are spirit and life: they are not letters; the letter cramps and distorts the meaning, yet without the letter we could not get even a dim glimpse of the immeasurable and eternal thought. As Christ's words are spirit and life, so the interpretation of them is a progressive science—not a science of lexicography, but a gift of spiritual discernment, a spirit of truth, an intuition, keen, certain, and sympathetic. We are daily seeing that in matters of science, ceremony, miracle, and parable the first meaning (say the superficial meaning) was not the meaning which

the inspired writers intended to convey. It is our joy to discover that as life passes into higher and nobler developments, it is itself the most lucid and powerful expositor of the inspired text, so that the Bible not only keeps abreast of all progress, but claims to have inspired the very advancement which sometimes apparently threatens its own heavenliness and infallibility. To what extent Christ privately explained to the disciples the doctrinal meaning of his death, after his resurrection, we do not know ; but we do know that he opened their understandings that they might understand the Scriptures, and that he gave them the Holy Ghost. We are certainly justified in believing that there were in the words of the apostles, as in the words of the prophets, meanings of which the speakers themselves had but an imperfect and inadequate conception, if there is any value at all in even the one-thousandth part of the varied and magnificent literature which has sprung from their fertile pages. Out of the short gamut which they were inspired to give has come every note of the soul's best music—music tempestuous as a midnight storm at sea, tender as prayers in sorrow, joyful as the gladness of victory ; trumpetings that vibrate the world over, and lute tones that soothe the heart, sore with many an unspoken grief. Out of the handful of corn which God sent us by them has come a harvest, thick and golden, that shakes like Lebanon when fanned by the autumn wind. What more has to come who can tell ? He who prophesies great things in this direction will be nearer the truth than he who insists upon the completeness and finality of the letter, for who can find out the Almighty unto perfection, and limit the shining of the infinite light ?

XI.

THE POINT OF REST.

"I will give you rest."—MATT. xi, 28.

DR. ISAAC WATTS says: "Christ died to appease the wrath of God." Bishop Heber says: "Christ died to meet his Father's anger." The poet Cowper says: "God is always formidable to me, except when I see him disarmed of his sting by having sheathed it in the body of Jesus Christ." And a living writer, in quoting these sentiments, says: "Now such a representation of mediation as this is not only directly contrary to Scripture, but it is essentially heathenish, and destructive of all real love to God." President Edwards says: "Christ suffered the positive infliction of divine wrath." He also says: "Revenging justice then spent all its force upon him on account of our guilt, and this was the way and means by which Christ stood up for the honour of God's justice—viz. by thus suffering its terrible accusations: for when he had undertaken for sinners, and had substituted himself in their room, divine justice could have its due honour no other way than by his suffering its revenges." Dr. Jenkyn says: "The most amazing circumstance connected with his death was, that he suffered as one disowned and reprobated and forsaken of God." And Dr. Dwight says: "The hiding of God's face from Christ implied that Christ suffered God's hatred and contempt," whereupon Dr. Payne exclaims: "No

sober-minded man can admit this." But Dr. Timothy Dwight was a "sober-minded man"; and not only did he admit it, he declared and preached and enforced it as a Christian doctrine. What, then, are "unlearned and ignorant men" to do in such a controversy? If to have a right view of the atonement affects in any way the salvation and destiny of the soul, how can Isaac Watts and Frederick Robertson both be in the same heaven? James Martineau would characterise the poet Cowper's theology, just quoted, as "a coarse and wretched error;" how then can James Martineau and William Cowper find a common point of rest in their theological thought and hope? Calvin says: "It was incumbent on Christ to feel the severity of divine revenge, in order that he might both ward off wrath and satisfy a righteous sentence;" and on the other hand, it has been shown by abundant and well-certified quotation that the Fathers "looked upon the sacrifice of Calvary, however explained, as part of an eternal purpose, not a device to avert the wrath of the Father, but the utterance of his unfailing love." The advocates of the moral theory of the atonement have a right to quote the authority of the Fathers in support of their view, and in doing so they will call to their aid a very powerful and honourable defence. Augustine says: "What means this, 'reconciled by the death of his Son'? Is it that when the Father was angry with us he looked on the death of his Son for us and was appeased? Had the Son, then, been so completely appeased already that he even vouchsafed to die for us, but was the Father still so incensed that he would not be appeased unless the Son died for us? Would the Father, unless he had been already appeased, deliver up his Son for us, not sparing him? Do not these statements seem to contradict each other? In the former the Son dies for us, and the Father

is reconciled to us by his death; but in the latter the Father, as though he first loved us, himself does not spare his Son for our sakes, himself delivers him up to death for us. But I see that the Father loved us before also, not only before the Son died for us, but before he created the world. Nor was the Son delivered up for us, as it were, unwillingly when the Father spared him not, since it is said of him also, 'who loved me, and gave himself for me.' The Father, therefore, and the Son, and the Spirit of both, work all things at the same time, equally and harmoniously; yet we are justified in the blood of Christ, and reconciled to God through the death of his Son."

In trying to find the point of rest amidst these sharp collisions we must fall back on principles which we have already attempted to illustrate, especially the principle that the whole is greater than the part, and that therefore one man is not all men, and one mood is not the whole mind even of the same man. A cautionary word may not be out of place to the young reader who may be tempted to allow himself to suppose that where there is so much controversy there cannot be any truth. That would indeed be more than unwise, it would be manifestly absurd. Is there no truth in patriotism because one man is a Conservative and another a Liberal? Is there no reality or truth in national government because one theory is monarchical and another is republican? Or is all the truth necessarily on one or the other side of these sharp controversies? May not each have its own degree or aspect of truth? And may there not be circumstances which determine the development and authority of certain forms of dominion? If it be replied that we are now discussing matters of supposed divine revelation, it is not

the less but the more certain that there will be controversy, and perhaps stubborn and uncharitable antagonism, as to the proper meaning, scope, and application of the thing supposed to be revealed. The classification of artificial flowers has never become a science, but there is a botany of the living fields and gardens. No man ever went to prison for affirming the possibility of building a wall, but men have been imprisoned and accounted mad for asserting the rotundity and revolution of the earth. I want you to see through these illustrations how true and certain it is that the greater the subject the greater will be the controversies which it will occasion in living and independent minds.

My argument will be that all these theories and views of the work of Christ may be literally true to the consciousness and the spiritual necessities of the men who uphold them, without being dogmatically binding upon the men who oppose them, and that whether they are literally true or are merely the most convenient expression of the mind's supreme necessities at a given time, they do not touch the one great truth that precedes, overrules, and outlasts all human theorising and speculation.

Take the poet Cowper's testimony to begin with : " God is always formidable to me, except when I see him disarmed of his sting by having sheathed it in the body of Jesus Christ." Observe this is not laid down merely as a speculative doctrine which the poet is prepared to maintain by argument ; it is announced as the only view of God which could satisfactorily meet a certain state of mind. The poet is speaking of himself alone ; he is revealing his spiritual standpoint ; he is melancholy, fearful of heart, and the victim of cruel apprehensions and convictions,

" Damned below Judas, more abhorred than he was,"

and to him in that state God was formidable until he saw the sting of wrath sheathed in the body of Jesus Christ. To a man in a healthier state of mind such a view might be inexpressibly abhorrent and distressing ; he might even go so far as to say that he could never love such a God as was worshipped by the poet Cowper. And both the men might be right ! If you had said to the poet, God loves you ; he sent his Son Jesus Christ to tell you so, and to lead you home to peace and rest and joy, the poet would have exclaimed : This is impossible ! this is mockery ! You do not know how many and terrible are my sins ! You do not see what I see. The avenging spectres, the spirits of wrath and torment that throng the sultry air, are hidden from you. O God, I dread thee ! You must meet his case by a tragedy that shall overpower the disease within him ; he must be appalled, confounded, affrighted by a spectacle that shall overmatch the horror spread over his mind by the realisation of his own sin, and out of that greater tragedy he may come to derive the benefit appropriate to his peculiar distress. But, you will say, God either did sheathe the sting of his wrath in the body of Jesus Christ or he did not, therefore the poet Cowper was either distinctly right or wrong. Pardon me for saying that a case of this kind cannot be put thus sharply and decisively ; it is not a case as between the right hand and the left : all conclusions are not reached by technical apparatus ; consciousness, sense of need, peculiarity of temperament, mental compass, moral training, all have to do with the broad question of spiritual interpretations. The poet Cowper knew Greek perhaps better than many scholars ; his conscience was even morbidly sensitive ; his reverence was lofty and constant ; his aspirations seemed to his timidity and fearfulness of spirit to lose themselves in clouds black with gathering storms ; with this learning

and this temperament he approached the New Testament, and there found that Jesus Christ, in bearing our sins and carrying our iniquities, received into his body the sting of an outraged and avenging justice. No other view could have made itself felt in the then state of his heart. This was the theology that saved him from the hell of despair. The question is not whether it is your view, or whether Cowper himself would have held it had his temperament been other than it was ; it is a simple matter of fact that a learned and honest man could approach God in no other way than by this conception of his relation to Jesus Christ.

Set in opposition to this the case of a man whose constitution and temperament are of an exactly opposite type, and it will be a psychological impossibility for that man to accept the view which alone saved the poet from despair. Even if he found Cowper's very words in the New Testament itself, they would be a stumbling-block and an offence unto him ; he would seek an escape through some real or imaginary difficulty in the grammar ; he would flee into the context for alleviation. If he could not have relief from the torture of the literal doctrine, he would either chasten and ennoble it through the medium of his imagination, or bow to it with a reluctance which is fatal to rest and joy. These psychological difficulties, when found in connection with a good and honest life, are not to be treated lightly. To ascribe them to speculative fancifulness or love of word-play, is flippant and ungenerous,—in many cases rude and unjust. The man whom we are supposing for the purposes of this illustration is thoroughly in earnest, supremely anxious to know and love and serve Christ. His notions of abstract or metaphysical justice are not amongst the principal characteristics of his mind ; he is emotional, patient, hopeful, and his fatherliness is

very pitiful and long-suffering : rectorial discipline there is next to none in his family ; probably he may even felicitate himself upon the fact that he never lifted up the rod upon one of his children, without being able to add the felicitation that none of his children ever deserved it. Such a man coming to the life of Christ will, by no fantastic choice, but by the operation of a divine law, appropriate the elements which are most congenial to his own nature, and in doing so will find a theology which never could have been discovered or accepted by such a mind as Cowper's. Observe the terms carefully, if you please, for I have no wish to teach the obviously absurd doctrine that divine revelation must accommodate itself to accidental moods and whims. I am speaking of the true and proper constitution of the mind ; of the constitution which individualises the man from all other men, and which must mould and colour every conviction and every sentiment. Out of this normal difference will come all the startling distinctiveness of Peter and John and Paul, men so marked that they are known by their accent and tone quite as much as by their doctrine and logic.

A third example will be very different. Imagine a man of unusual compass of mind, distinctively critical and by so much tending towards a scepticism that insists upon etymological proof of everything that is submitted for acceptance ; a mind that will hold long and severe controversy over the niceties of grammar, and will suspend a faith until it has determined the force of a preposition or the proper arrangement of a disputed punctuation ; not a prosaic mind either, but one that will have poetry by itself as poetry, and prose by itself as prose, and will separate as clearly and broadly between fancy and logic as between flying and walking. Such a mind coming to the New

Testament will probably be deeply impressed by the simple and pure humanity of Jesus Christ. It will lay hold upon that as something absolutely indisputable, and will wonder that anything beyond humanity in its noblest and sweetest aspect has ever been found in his illustrious and holy character. Such a mind as I am supposing is solemnised and ruled by a most rigid reverence : it could almost worship the sunrise, and is only saved from doing so because reverence is due to One alone, and that is God. To such a mind Jesus Christ is as a sunrise, a beauteous and pathetic revelation, a light that will warm into noonday and broaden into summer, but still only the largest of the orbs itself enkindled by a higher flame. Such a mind will love Christ, and follow him, and call him Lord and Master, and see nothing but infinite excellence in his gracious and tender life. There it will stop. There it will draw upon itself the designation of being unitarian. To myself it is an inexplicable mystery that any man can read the New Testament and doubt the true and proper deity of Jesus Christ ; to my eyes it is written upon every page ; it is the very crown and glory of revelation ! But as a matter of fact the New Testament is read with other results, and is so read by men illustrious alike for gifts and graces. I dare not question the Christianity of William Ellery Channing or of James Martineau ; in every respect they are immeasurably my superiors ; in character and in genius, in spirit and in service, they are as high as the highest amongst religious thinkers ; yet my soul could no more live upon their theology than my body could live upon ice. To me it is utterly mistaken as to the true personality of Christ ; it is insufficient, one-sided, and mortally cold. It would be easy for me to say that such men are blind, but I should have to prove it ; or to say that they are dishonest, but I should be unable to forgive

my own injustice and uncharitableness. To such men the theology of Cowper is little better than blasphemy, yet they read the same New Testament and pray to the same God !

I want to know where the point of rest is in such conflicts ; but before venturing to suggest it, let me show you that not only are there such controversies as between one expositor and another, but that in the same soul there may be such variations of mood and temperature as to require, in the course of a lifetime, every possible aspect in which the infinitely various ministry of Jesus Christ can be set. So real is this, that what may be true to one mood may lie so far away from the truth distinctively perceived and seized by another mood as almost to contradict and annul it. Sometimes, for example, nothing can satisfy me but the severest demonstrations of Paul ; sometimes, by reason of weariness and fainting of spirit, that reasoning is a burden to me, and must be replaced by the tender and soothing ministry of John. In some moods God is a sun, in others he is as a cool shadow ; yesterday he was a strong tower, to-day he is a gentle shepherd. Of his fulness I receive just the grace most needed in the ever-changing moods of the soul. Perhaps we may see this more clearly if we come out of the theological circle for a moment. Let us imaginatively create two sets of circumstances. The day is memorable amongst days for the blueness of its translucent sky and the tender healthfulness of its balmy wind coming up from the south-west without a chill or a sting ; summer lies broadly and warmly on the sunny landscape, which is rich in all the tints of various green, foiled and sharpened by many a darker hue ; the spirit of peace is brooding over the quiet scene, making it still with a silence that is not the less holy for the trill and twitter of many a glad bird ; and

you are there, with every appetite at rest, released from anxiety and care for the time being, a slumbrous joy lulling the soul and bringing it into harmony with the solemn quietness of the day ; with half-closed eyes you see visions in the air and sky ; behind the cloud yonder, white enough to be snow, warm enough to be wool, you see a face bright as immortal hope, tender as forgiving love ; the great stretch of faintly tinted cloud farther on might be the holy highway into heaven itself, so broad, so full of luring and welcoming light ;—surely, say you, with a joy not far from tears, this is the Sabbath of the world. Could you in that moment put a knife to the throat of a lamb ?

But let the day remain just as it is, westering a little, but glorious still ; and let your own circumstances be changed. Returning from chase or exploit that has exhausted your strength and awakened your appetite, weary and faint, with necessity at its keenest point, will you feast upon the glowing beauty and spare the lamb ? The idea that would have revolted you under one set of circumstances is the only idea that can satisfy you under another !

Going to the New Testament with a contented and restful heart, you seek out the passages which are most consonant with your own feeling ; with the poet you “rove amongst the promises with ever fresh delight.” Every passage that speaks of love, hope, rest, is sweet to you, is, indeed, as a friend welcome to your heart. “In the coming of Christ you see peace on earth and good will toward men, and with gladness of soul you add your voice to the “multitude of the heavenly host praising God.” Your soul doth magnify the Lord, for your eyes have seen his salvation, and for the spirit of heaviness you have received the garment of praise. So the mood of your mind will

determine your appropriation of Scriptural instruction and comfort. But go when deeply and even mortally convinced of sin, when the arrows of the Lord are rankling in your heart, when you know that you have no right to the milk and honey of the Word because of your sin, and when God's love is a reproach and a torment because of the piercing and relentless accusations of a conscience that will not be appeased,—a conscience that drives you to despair and will not release you until you have paid the uttermost farthing! A pursuing conscience, that refuses sleep to your eyelids because of wickedness unconfessed; that mocks your feeble though monstrous attempts at atonement: a conscience that scorches you like "fire of hell," and brings up perdition to meet you from far. If you then venture to touch a promise, it will sting you. If you put your lips to the well of consolation, the water will start back from your felonious approach. If you say the darkness will shield you, lo! the lightnings of God turn it into intolerable day. In that hour you must see the work of Christ in its most tragical and appalling aspect, for nothing less can teach a guilt so wicked, an insanity so mad. You must see the literal blood, the literal agony, the literal despair, the literal substitution for your own lost soul; and if you get any hope at all it can only be from such passages as, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed"; "He bore my sins in his own body on the tree."

Gather together all the souls represented by the poet Cowper, and Christ will bless them, and say, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold,"—the souls represented by Robertson, and Christ will bless them, and say, "Other

sheep I have which are not of this fold,"—the souls represented by Channing, and Christ will bless them, and say, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold." Remember, one man is not all men; one truth is not all truth; one mood is not the whole mind. I cannot read the life of Christ without seeing that as he began with us where he could, so we are to begin with him where we can. He began by healing the body; we may begin by touching the hem of his garment. We are not expected to begin with a fully elaborated theology. Whatever point you see most clearly in the character and work of Jesus is the point at which you should begin. You are sure of that point; it shines like a star. Keep to it; by-and-by other points will appear, as you have seen the stars troop forth in the deepening twilight. But there must be a common point of rest. What is that? The common point of rest is a fact, not a theory; it is a history, not a speculation. You will find it in these Scriptures:—

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."¹

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."²

"Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."³

"We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."⁴

"By faith that is in me."⁵

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."⁶

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life."⁷

¹ 1 Tim. i. 15.

³ 1 John iv. 2.

⁶ Acts xvi. 31.

² 1 John iv. 9.

⁴ 1 John iv. 14.

⁷ John iii. 36.

⁵ Acts xxvi. 18.

This is the point of rest. But the moment we begin to inquire How? as to the work of Christ, we enter upon endless controversy. To theorise is to separate. It is evident, therefore, that we are to be saved by a fact and not by a speculation,—by Christ, and not by any theological construction of his work. In a sense never to be fully explained Christ was an “unspeakable gift”—a gift for which there are no words, no theories, no creeds, good enough; his work is a power to be felt in the heart, not to be measured out in words, subtle as a dream, mighty as a law, anonymous, infinite, unspeakable.

ILLUSTRATIVE ADDRESSES.

[Public interest in pulpit work is often excited by the mention of names high in literature. In this section of the book I give illustrations which have been found useful. To me this bringing together of the opinions of leading minds has been a most helpful exercise. I respectfully commend it to all preachers and teachers.]

In religion, as in all other sections of life, it is difficult to be a consistent hypocrite. Edmund Burke declares that "hypocrisy is no cheap vice, nor can our natural temper be masked for many years together." Burke's opinion is that men are hypocrites in religion because they wish to escape the discipline of personal conviction and faith. Burke's words are worthy of his repute: "Hypocrisy, of course, delights in the most sublime speculations; for, never intending to go beyond speculation, it costs nothing to have it magnificent." Where you have sublime speculation you naturally expect sublime conduct. It cannot be too widely known that there may be no connection between speculation and practice. Shakespeare remarks upon this fact,

"Oh, what may man within him
hide,
Though angel on the outward
side!"

Jeremy Taylor expresses the same thought another way: "Whoever is a hypocrite in his religion, mocks God, presenting to him the outside and reserving the inward for his enemy." Thus do men make fools of themselves, as if God did not penetrate the inmost life and motive of every soul! Milton says that "hypocrisy is the only evil that walks invisible, except to God alone." The hypocrite is a practical atheist. No man can really and truly believe in the omniscience of God and in a judgment to come and yet maintain a life-long concealment of his very self. This is a miracle beyond human working. The hypocrite must have utterly destroyed his own self-respect. He can hardly be said to have an interior life. He is simply a great void, having absolutely nothing but an outside so carefully burnished as to deceive, if possible the very elect.

A clever writer has described hypocrisy as the shell after the kernel is eaten out. Men are not necessarily Christians simply because they profess Christianity. They profess to be religious simply that they may gain some real or supposed advantage. Men may go to church as an investment. Yet hypocrisy has its useful suggestions. A bad man pays a tribute to Christianity by professing it. He thinks he will make something by his profession. A great writer has said that "hypocrisy is the ready homage that vice pays to virtue." No man ever yet claimed to be a professional liar. No man has ever written the word liar on his own forehead as a caution to society to distrust and avoid him. If he tells lies it is in the hope that he will be believed, and that men will thus far trust him with their property or honour him with their confidence. A French writer has attempted to make a fine distinction when she says, "Sin is not so sinful as hypocrisy." Hypocrisy is sin. Hypocrisy may be many sins in one. Let us believe with Addison that "the hypocrite would not put on the appearance of virtue if it was not the most proper means to gain love." The only protection against hypocrisy is the indwelling spirit of truth. Until that spirit takes possession of us our lives will be a series of shifts, evasions, and deceits.

Truth is not a trick; it is a spirit. Wouldst thou worship God? Worship him in spirit and in truth, and when thou art true to God thou canst not be false to men.

There is a self-reliance that is nothing more than insolence and boasting. It is not such self-reliance that the moralist will commend to the admiration of young minds. Tennyson teaches us that "thoroughly to believe in one's own self, so one's own self were thorough, were to do great things." That is the vital point. Be very sure that yourself is "thorough" before you rely upon it. A great French writer gives good counsel respecting the exercise of self-reliance: "Whatever your sex or position, life is a battle in which you are to show your pluck; and woe be to the coward! Whether passed on a bed of sickness or on a tented field, it is the same fair play, and admits no foolish distinctions. Despair and postponement are cowardice and defeat. Men were born to succeed, not to fail." This is true in a broad sense, and yet the statement may require careful modification. Failure is sometimes necessary to success.

There are intermediate failures, humbling enough at the time, but

vitality and permanently educational. Failure may be an inspiration as well as a discouragement. Failure tests our self-reliance. Every man should set before himself the possibility of perfect success, but he should never imagine that it is to be easily or cheaply won. When Jacob pronounced a blessing upon Gad he uttered these remarkable words, "Gad, a troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last." He was not to be troubled by the intermediate overthrow; he was to be inspired by the confidence of final victory. I never weary in reiterating the doctrine that every kingdom that is worth possessing is to be won through great tribulation.

Self-reliance need in no degree impair our sense of dependence upon God. Plato says, "Do thine own work, and know thyself." Another practical writer assures us that it is seldom that we find out how great are our resources until we are thrown upon them. We never suspect the saintly George Herbert of impiety, yet even he commits himself to this broad counsel, "Help thyself, and God will help thee." The counsel might have started from the other point, and in George Herbert's mind it undoubtedly did so; then the counsel would read, God helps thee that thou mayest help

thyself. Our self is God's. We have nothing that we have not received. So then, this counsel to help ourself only throws us back in more profound and vivid consciousness upon the divine ministry which trains and completes our life.

A rich and lifelong experience is well represented by Kossuth when he says, "Humility is the part of wisdom, and is most becoming in men. But let no one discourage self-reliance; it is, of all the rest, the greatest quality of true manliness." Livy says that a person under the firm persuasion that he can command resources virtually has them. Have great faith in your destiny. If we had faith as a grain of mustard seed we could remove mountains. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Hesitation always means defeat. You can do far greater things than you have yet attempted. Put forth all your powers and be wise enough to begin upon a moderate scale, doing well even the smallest things which you undertake. Probably President Garfield is as well entitled to give advice upon the practical side of life as any man. Hear what he says: "Nine times out of ten, the best thing that can happen to a young man is to be tossed overboard and compelled

to sink or swim for himself. In all my acquaintance I never knew a man to be drowned who was worth the saving." Garfield was not a theorist, but a practical everyday worker, hence the value of his counsel. Philip II. exclaimed, "Time and I against any two!" Such a man could not fail. "The supreme fall of falls is this—the first doubt of one's self." This is the doctrine of Madame de Gasparin.

There is no necessary connection between self-reliance and self-conceit. Sometimes self-conceit is softened into self-esteem and even self-love, but, disguise it as we may, there is a black spot in its heart. One of the old puritan writers declared that self is the great antichrist and anti-God in the world, that sets up itself above all else. There is a self-esteem that clothes character with dignity. It was to that self-esteem that Milton referred when he said, "Ofttimes nothing profits more than self-esteem, grounded on just and right." Self-depreciation is often the meanest form of self-conceit. Distrust the man who is always apologising for his own existence. Shakespeare is right when he says "love thyself last"; he does not exclude self-regard, he simply puts it in its right place. Many men are exceedingly amiable until

their self-love is touched; touch that, and you will soon see how many evil spirits are nestling under the velvet of well-simulated amiability. I have kept company of an official kind with a man who has deceived me into the delusion that he was amiability and modesty in one exquisite blend. The moment, however, that his self-importance was touched he showed himself in colours of an unsuspected description. You do not know men so long as you agree with them. Nor can you read any character whose ambitions you constantly gratify. Russell Lowell has pithily said, "There's a deal o' solid kicking in the meekest-looking mule." I can bear testimony to this fact, for the meekest-looking mule I ever saw could kick with his fore-legs as well as his hind-hoofs. The way out of all self-importance is to live in constant sympathy with a divine ideal. He who lives night and day with the Son of man will be delivered from the vexation and torment of self-exaggeration.

"Work while it is called day." The country is undoubtedly going down in point of quality of labour. How to shorten the hours of labour, how to get as much as possible for doing as little as possible, how to shirk all drudgery, would seem to be in some quarters

the supreme question of the hour. This is an undoubted sign of moral decay. We must get back to the best conceptions of labour if ever the country is to be saved from utter destruction. The working man is the salvation of the land simply because he is a man who works. If his work is a merely nominal pretence, he is not entitled to any of the honours which belong to faithful industry. Horace Mann well says that genius may conceive, but patient labour must consummate. This is a distinction we must never lose sight of.

Conception is as certainly true labour as is consummation. We must go back to the spirituality of labour. Behind all labour that is useful, there lives the originating and directing thought. It will be a dark day for our highest fortunes when we look upon labour as limited to manual exercises. It is not the hand that labours, but the mind. Herein a word should be spoken for authors, poets, preachers, and other intellectual servants. Their clothing may indicate some measure of gentility, and gentility is often falsely supposed to be evidence of leisure and of partial indolence. We must get rid of this miserable delusion. The poet who never soils his hands may work harder than the agricultural labourer who

never dips a pen. Preaching may be quite as toilsome as ploughing.

When we attain the greatest efficiency in our work we shall overcome its mere burdensomeness. An able writer has shown that work may by perfect mastery become play—and even music. A French writer has said, "The really efficient labourer will be found not to crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure." This happy issue can only arise out of well-disciplined service. Strait is the gate that opens upon any kingdom that is worth having. We must bend our necks to the yoke, and accept the goading of a directing hand if we would attain proficiency in our labour. Proficiency means repose. The way to repose is the thorny road of perseverance.

On this matter Goethe has spoken a most wise word: "Many young painters would never have taken their pencils in hand if they could have felt, known, and understood, early enough, what really produced a master like Raphael." Happily we do not see the end from the beginning. We do not know how much travelling there must be done before we reach any land flowing with milk and honey. God means our labour

to be part of his gracious providence; God did not make man to be a sluggard. Carlyle teaches the true doctrine: "Labour is life; from the inmost heart of the worker rises his God-given force, the sacred, celestial life-essence breathed into him by Almighty God." This is the right idea of labour, and will show us how true is the remark that "Labour is the law of happiness." Thomas Binney was never weary of teaching the dignity of labour. One of his sentences is well worth quoting: "God is constantly teaching us that nothing valuable is ever obtained without labour, and that no labour can be honestly expended without getting its value in return."

One of the old preachers puts the matter vividly thus: "Alexander the Great, reflecting on his friends degenerating into sloth and luxury, told them that it was a most slavish thing to luxuriate and a most royal thing to labour." Indolence is indeed hard work. The first Napoleon said that to have nothing to do was enough to kill any general in his army. To the faithful worker there is never any dragging of time. The man who works steadily never knows how fast the clock is going. It is difficult for him to believe in the expiration of time, because he has been so happily employed.

Indolence is very conscious of the leaden hours. It is always looking for something which never comes. If you would be happy always have plenty to do, and do it in the spirit of appreciation and thankfulness. Mazzini says, "Labour is the divine law of our existence; repose is desertion and suicide." Carlyle says all true work is sacred. Charles Buxton says, "The fact is, nothing comes—at least, nothing good. All has to be fetched." This is the old doctrine of the philosophers and moralists. Cicero says, "What is there that is illustrious that is not also attended by labour." Homer has a sentence which we are apt to think is very modern, whereas it is only modern in its highest application: "Labour conquers all things."

Many of our best writers have not hesitated to say that we should all be able to do something with our hands. Carlyle speaks thus admirably: "The true epic of our times is not 'Arms and the Man,' but 'Tools and the Man,' an infinitely wider kind of epic." Ruskin follows in the same vein: "It would be well if all of us were good handicraftsmen in some kind." Mr. Beecher happily remarks, "There is always work, and tools to work withal, for those who will."

Another great American, President Grant, says, "Labour disgraces no man; unfortunately you occasionally find men who disgrace labour." What are you going to labour at? The idler is a parasite and a thief. I call upon all men to believe John Ruskin: "If you want knowledge, you must toil for it; if food, you must toil for it; and if pleasure, you must toil for it; toil is the law." Believe these wise words and begin your work at once.

The formation of habit may be either conscious or unconscious. The question is not whether we will form habits or not form them; their formation is a necessity of our life. Strange as it may appear, a man may have a habit of having no habits. It is the same with creed. Many a man boasts that he has no creed without realising that no creed is a creed. The most writers whom I have consulted upon the subject of habit seem to have turned their attention to the lower aspect of their great subject. Bad habits have been more remarked upon than good habits. We should bear in mind that habits may be good as well as bad.

Robert Hall seems to have overlooked this fact when he said, "Beware of fixing habits in a child." Why not fix the habit of early rising? of cleanliness?

of punctuality? or of prompt obedience? Paley truly says that "A large part of Christian virtue consists in right habits." Victor Hugo was thinking in a totally opposite direction when he declared that "habit is the nursery of errors." Goethe must have been thinking between the two when he declared habit to be the most imperious of all masters. There is, of course, a habit that is simply pedantic. It expresses no moral principle. A man may walk upon one side of the street and constantly avoid the other without having any reason for doing so. That is mere affectation or pedantry, and is to be avoided. There are habits which easily degenerate into superstitions. There is a danger of this, even in religious observances. Thus a man may easily become a self-idolator. He does a thing the twenty-first time for no other reason than that he did it twenty times before. A man of this kind soon comes to be known as faddy, eccentric, and ceremonious.

Surely Lavater was not thinking of good habits when he said, "Habit is altogether too arbitrary a master for me to submit to." If I have a habit of keeping my appointments, am I under the dominion of an imperious monster? Am I a slave because I invariably practise the habit of

courtesy? To questions of this kind there can of course be only one answer. It appears to me that Lord Bacon has stated the case in full view of both sides of the question. He says, "Habit, if wisely and skilfully formed, becomes truly a second nature; but unskilfully and unmethodically directed, it will be, as it were, the ape of Nature, which imitates nothing to the life, but only clumsily and awkwardly."

Dr. Chalmers puts the case thus clearly: "Acts of virtue ripen into habits; and the goodly and permanent result is the formation or establishment of a virtuous character." John Foster stands in high repute as a wise thinker and trustworthy director of thought and action; yet that strong thinker declares that "in the great majority of things habit is a greater plague than ever afflicted Egypt." The reference is evidently to bad habits, and the judgment must therefore be taken with this distinct and large reservation.

We must never forget that habit is neither good nor bad in itself. Nor is sincerity. We must know what a man is sincere about. He may be sincere in hatred. Saul of Tarsus was sincere in persecuting Christians. There is a habit of self-consideration which

never takes into account either the rights or the feelings of others. It is not enough for a man to say simply that he has been in the habit of doing this or that and therefore must go on doing it. That might be a good reason if he lived on a mountain-top three thousand feet away from any other human creature. Society would be impossible if personal habits did not allow themselves to be modified, in so far as they are mechanical, by approved social usages. Married people must give and take. So must travellers. So must disputants in all cases of mere expediency or arrangement. No man must set up his personal habits as a final standard of social action, we must always remember the old motto, "One man's meat is another man's poison." We live in a world in which one thing modifies another, and if we defy that law we set up a petty infallibility which must cover us with contempt.

"Men's evil manners live in brass; their virtues we write in water." So says the immortal bard. Let us get into the habit of being virtuous. Good deeds should not be either the exceptions or the surprises of our lives. In the long-run to do a thing right is really easier than to do it wrong. But this means discipline, and discipline is habit. Right-doing

is music : wrong-doing is discord. Wrong-doing never brings any pleasure with it. To do wrong is to lose at once the disposition and the power to do right. Then let us beware of our habits, for they become mediums of joy or instruments of vengeance. Truly did Carlyle say, "Habit is the deepest law of human nature : it is our supreme strength if also, in certain circumstances, our miserablest weakness." A good habit is a good investment.

"Perfect love casteth out fear."

But what is fear? Lord Bacon says: "Nothing is to be feared but fear." There is a servile fear, and there is a fear that is filial. The former must be the kind of fear upon which Shakespeare remarks, "Fears, make devils of cherubins." Fear is reverence. Fear is adoration. We are commanded to fear God. Aristotle says, "No one loves the man whom he fears." Thus we come back upon the servile line. Always imperial in imagination, Edmund Burke says, with a conciseness which reminds us of Beaconsfield, "Fear is the mother of safety." It is so religiously ; so long as we fear God it will be impossible for us to treat his law with levity, or to modify the standard of his discipline. Love is a stern disciplinarian. Its life is sacrifice.

What fear was that which Tennyson contemplated when he said, "Fear stared in her eyes and chalked her face"? Under such fear it is impossible for any man to show his best quality or use his fullest strength. We must be at peace in order to bring all our powers into happiest play. The timid man is never half himself. When we fear our work we cannot do it. Upon this subject Dr. Johnson says, "Timidity is a disease of the mind, obstinate and fatal; for a man once persuaded that any impediment is insuperable has given it, with respect to himself, that strength and weight which it had not before." True courage bends circumstances to its own will. Herein is Wesley's exclamation pertinent: "Fear laughs at impossibilities, and cries, It shall be done!" Faith is thus the conqueror of fear. Small faith means dejection; great faith means triumph.

There is a simulated courage which thinly covers the basest cowardice. Much boasting is quite as likely to arise from fear as from conscious ability. Where there is supreme ability there is never the faintest disposition to self-assertion or to the practice of any of the mean tricks of vanity. The great man is always the modest man. He keeps his

courage for great occasions. The bantam cock is more easily excited than the royal eagle. When a bantam cock fluffs his feathers the sun must be struck with a sense of comedy. Surely a laugh has sometimes been seen to play on the face of the sky, it must have been when the bantam cock was crowing his loudest. There is, no doubt, a strength of despair, but that is not the courage which wise men prize. Sir Philip Sidney says, "Fear is far more painful to cowardice than death to true courage." The coward is a great boaster. He is weakest when he is loudest. He evaporates in falsehood. He who is going to do great things never boasts beforehand. Modesty keeps its strength for action.

To live in God is to live above all mean fear. "Fear God and have no other fear" is the motto of one of the greatest European statesmen. This fear is never to be confounded with Pharisaism, vanity, self-display, and hollow vaunting. It is deep, solemn, silent, grand, the very bloom of the soul. Probably the strongest man has been occasionally surprised into a fear that has looked like cowardice. It has been well said that "No one but a poltroon will boast that he never was afraid." There is a daring under which many a fear is concealed. In this matter, as

in all others, let us be sincere, simple, unaffected, and wholly real. There have been writers who have encouraged the development of fear; for example, Richter says, "A man should always allow his fears to rise to their highest possible pitch, and then some consolation or other will suddenly fall, like a warm rain-drop on his heart." Probably we have all proved the wisdom of this remark. It is only another way of saying that it is always darkest before the dawn. Many a time the high hills and the rough rocks have seemed to shut me in and make all progress impossible, when lo! an opening has been discovered, passing through which I have come upon visions of landscape infinite in extent and beauty. *Nil desperandum.*

There is no need to fear. What is fear but another name for unbelief? God lives, therefore the end will be completeness and peace. I will not flinch from my Father's discipline. The rod that is in his hand will blossom. Besides, what can fear do, or anxiety, or distrust? Nothing—less than nothing. It is faith that works all the miracles of life.

"What is your life?" If you give a right answer to this in-

quity you will have no difficulty in knowing what to do with your faculties and opportunities. If you do not grasp the meaning of this great question, your life will be a daily perplexity and will certainly end in disappointment and bitterness. Remember that we go through our life on earth once for all. No rehearsal is permitted. We may rehearse every separate act of life in a very limited sense, life itself has only one beginning and one end. Milton says, "Live well; how long or short permit to Heaven."

Remember that life is made solemn by its uncertainty. We could order our affairs differently if we knew to a day when our life would end. It is no mere commonplace to remind ourselves of this uncertainty. The poet says, "The cradle and the tomb, alas! so nigh." In what light are we going to regard life? Is it animal or spiritual? Does it end in death, or only begin when we breathe ourselves into another world? Longfellow says that life is the gift of God and is divine. Is there not a very profound sense in which life is not only the gift of God but the very presence of the divine Personality within mortal conditions? Poets and moralists are constantly reminding us that life is not a question of days. The poet Young has

said "the life is long that answers life's great end." Some men live more in a day than others have found it possible to live in a year. Intensity is the measure of life. Intensity is unconscious of time. Madame de Staël says "life is only so far valuable as it serves for the religious education of the heart." When that education is completed life has been long. If you are unhappy because of the monotony of your life instantly break up that monotony by beneficent industry. Work for others and you will shorten your melancholy hours. Wise work is the most delightful of holidays. When the good of others is the object of our work our days are sunbeams and our services are songs.

Do not imagine that in life you can have everything your own way. Make up your mind to that from the very first, and you will be saved a thousand troubles. Even Carlyle, often the most bilious and discontented of mortals, recognised this fact. "No man," says he, "lives without jostling and being jostled; in all ways he has to elbow himself through the world, giving and receiving offence." We are educated and refined by friendly friction. Every man must do his own work how much controversy soever he may excite. Controversy is not

necessarily an evil. Not the dispute, but the spirit of the disputant settles the real quality and value of the controversy.

Follow those who take a bright view of life rather than those who speak of it in a spirit of moaning and resentment. Shakespeare says life's but a walking shadow. Again he says, "A man's life's no more than to say One." Whittier speaks of certain people "making their lives a prayer." Dean Swift says "the best of life is just tolerable; 'tis the most we can make of it." Beaconsfield gives a dreary picture which it is in every man's power to obliterate: "Youth is a blunder, manhood a struggle, old age a regret." This is the view of a pessimist. Others have taken a brighter view. Quaint old Thomas Fuller has said he lives long that lives well. A Roman poet has said "it is to live twice when we can enjoy the recollection of our former life." Schiller exclaims, "O God, how lovely still is life!" To some men life has been a great pain or a great blank. Carlyle says that to Johnson life was a prison, to be endured with heroic faith; and that to Hume it was little more than a foolish Bartholomew Fair show-booth. As might be expected, Voltaire takes a pessimistic view of life; his melancholy words are: "Life is thick sown

with thorns, and I know no other remedy than to pass quickly through them." It is infinitely better to believe Sir Thomas Browne when he declares that "Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us." In this spirit a distinguished American bishop has said. "There is no life so humble that if it be true and genuinely human and obedient to God, it may not hope to shed some of his light." It must have been in a moment of querulousness that Sydney Smith said, "Man lives only to shiver and perspire." Coleridge gives it as his opinion that

"To know, to esteem, to love, and then to part,
Makes up life's tale to many a feeling heart."

Horace Walpole caustically says, "We live for an instant upon a particle of a boundless universe, and are much like a butterfly that should argue about the nature of the seasons, and what creates their vicissitudes, and does not exist itself to see an annual revolution of them." Let us pray that we may live well. There should be no time for anger, none for bitterness, none for indolence. Already the books of account are being opened, and we must face the Auditor.

Cardinal Manning says, "Our character is our will; for what

we will we are." The Apostle Paul did not lay down a similar doctrine, for he said when he would do good evil was present with him; he deplored the fact that the things he would do he did not do, and the things he would not do were the very things which he did. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is often weak. The candlestick will last whilst the candles waste away. It cannot be denied, however, that the cultivation of the will is a supreme feature in moral discipline. Instead of determining to go ten miles and failing, we should determine to go half a mile and succeed. Day by day we should add to the half mile until we almost unconsciously travel the ten miles on which our minds was first set. It is better to succeed in little things and thus gain inspiration and confidence, than to fail in ambitious plans and thus become disheartened and pessimistic.

Men do not always know what their real character is. Circumstances develop us. "The fire in the flint shows not till it be struck." Such is the wisdom of Shakespeare. Men often surprise themselves, never having suspected either the weakness or the strength of their innermost nature. Emerson says, "Every one has more to hide than he has to

show." I dispute this altogether. It may be true within very moderate limits, and yet it may turn out to be untrue in the total development of the nature. The acorn has more to show than to hide. It hides its little self in the gloomy soil, but its larger and truer self it reveals in the full shining of the sun. There is more possibility of good in you than you have yet suspected. You are created in the image and likeness of God. Day by day search for that image and pray that you may discover that likeness, for it is along that line of holy quest that you will find morning and summer and heaven.

The pity is that so many persons prize talent above character. They would sacrifice everything to have their names enrolled on the radiant lists of genius. I believe with one of the most distinguished Frenchmen that, "Men succeed less by their talents than their character." Talent may be capricious, at best it is but local and limited. Character shines through the whole man in all his life and thought and action, and it slowly begets profound and grateful confidence. Taking the great average experiences of life, character is more frequently needed than genius. For days and months and years our life may be little more than mono-

tonous commonplace, yet every moment may require the exercise of honesty and faithfulness. Now, honesty and faithfulness are not detachable and separate points of quality, they are rather the last and complete expression of all the best features of the soul.

Colton says, "He that is good will infallibly become better, and he that is bad will as certainly become worse; for vice, virtue, and time are three things that never stand still." I dispute this proposition. Its assumptions are very great, and require to be most carefully discriminated. Nothing is allowed here for the exercise of regenerated will, or for the possible loss of it. The whole history of the world contravenes Colton's generalisation; good men have become bad; bad men have become good; this is the daily action of the world, and to deny it is to suspend discipline and to becloud many an anxious heart with hopelessness. Not a man amongst us but may become better. As for those who are good, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Dr. Johnson says, "A fallible being must fail somewhere." Is not this a mere play upon words? A fallible being will of course fail if he attempt too much. The ambitiousness of the attempt may carry its own failure.

Schelling heeds a great truth when he says, "There is in every man a certain feeling that he has been what he is from all eternity, and by no means become such in time." God hath set eternity in us. Our immortality is not proved by argument, it is affirmed by consciousness. There are instincts and longings, ambitions and prayers, poems and prophecies, which can only be accounted for by the innate conviction of immortality. This is what is called the power of an endless life. Only when we bring our greater selves to bear upon our lesser selves and our minor duties are we truly faithful to all the deepest and subtlest responsibilities of life. We must understand that in proportion as we have strong character we may excite strong antagonism. The poet Young has well said, "The man that makes a character makes foes." From all eternity light and darkness, good and evil, right and wrong have been in conflict. Some persons pass through life easily simply because they are not distinguished by any depth and force of character. Some men are born to fight. The fighters have won our liberties. The fighters have not accounted their lives dear unto themselves that they might overpower evil and establish justice and honour. A wise man has said, "Character is the diamond that scratches every

other stone." The diamond must cut. If we were stronger in conviction and more resolute in unselfish will we should have more enemies. What if it be a serious count in the indictment which we must eventually answer, that we have so lived as never to have incurred the disapprobation of the world?

Jeremy Taylor says, "He whose life seems fair, if all his errors were articulated against him, would seem vicious and miserable." It would seem to be with actions as it is with the expenditure of small sums. The economist will tell you that he simply would not believe he had parted with so much money if he had not set down in critical detail every penny

which he had spent. Who dare set down all his little failings, vanities, infirmities, and lapses, and then look the sum-total in the face? We must beware lest we become morbid in self-analysis. Let us remember that our life is now in process, and that the time of final judgment has not come. It is better when the mood of self-analysis comes heavily upon us to go out and do some deed of charity than to sit down and reap bitter things against ourselves. Beneficence will counterwork all morbid self-judgment. Whilst the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and the wretched are standing round about us thousands thick, we should never have one really unhappy moment, because in serving them we are really bringing sunshine and music into our own lives.

PHASES OF TEXTS

ADAM'S SIN AND GOD'S GRACE.

GEN. iii. 1-15.

Ver. 1. The **serpent** stands for deceit, cunning, guile, lust, unlawful desire. There is a serpent in every heart. We lose nothing by regarding the serpent as symbolical rather than literal.

Said unto the woman. Attacked man at the weakest point. The tempter is mean, cowardly, crafty. He avails himself of our curiosity, our hunger, our weakness. He waits until we are off our guard. Through and through he is bad. Resist him. Hate him. "Abhor that which is evil."

Yea, hath God said? He creates a doubt: he says, "Surely you must be mistaken. It is not possible that such laws can have been laid down. Your memory must have failed." How serpent-like is all such talk! Wherever you find cunning and meanness you find the serpent.

And the woman said unto the serpent. Never talk to the enemy. He wants to lure you into doubts and admissions. Run from him. Regard his approach as an insult. He has no claim upon your attention. Do not consider your duty a question for conference between you and the unbeliever. Obedience is not a subject for discussion.

Ver. 2, 3. God's word is clear enough. We know our duty. The lawyer who tempted Christ knew well enough what was written in the law. Eve knew her limitations clearly. Such limitations are not topics of conversation. They are tests; they are the indisputable conditions of life. Eve did not say she was uncertain; she spoke definitely, intelligently, precisely. Look into your own conscience, and see

how thoroughly you know what you ought to do.

Ver. 4, 5. Evil can be as definite as good. **The serpent** adopted a dogmatic tone. Mere positiveness of assertion is nothing. The devil plays upon double meaning. The word "**die**" may mean animal death or spiritual death. There is a death of innocence, a death of hope, a death of sonship. Life may be regarded as a series of deaths. Man dies out of infancy into youth, out of youth into middle age, out of middle age into seniority; he dies out of death into immortality.

For God doth know, etc. In a sense all this is true. The devil likes half-truths. They give him his chance. A lie pure and naked seldom serves his purpose. It may not be a good thing for our eyes to be opened. Eyes may be opened too soon. It may be our ruin to "know evil." There was originally no need to know it. By putting our hand into the fire we may know pain. By committing sin we may know remorse. But is all this worth doing? Knowledge may be bought at too great a price.

Ver. 6. There is no virtue in abstaining from a tree that is poisonous, or repulsive, or in any way even disagreeable. The trial might be in the very excellence.

There is no merit in choosing beautiful things. The adoption of a comely and well-nurtured child may be an act of conscious or unconscious selfishness. Resist some temptations for the very reason that they are pleasant. Resist some wisdom because it *is* wisdom, and is even true. Some wisdom we intentionally keep from children.

Ver. 7. The serpent was right. In very deed "**the eyes of them both were opened**," and they stood in a new world, so bare, so bleak, so cold! There is but a step between us and death, one step, one word, one deed! Yes; they bought wisdom, but it was a knowledge of their own nakedness. They bought the knowledge of their own ruin!

They sewed fig-leaves together. They began the tragedy of sinful civilisation. Virtue costs less than vice. Vice lives by trick and experiment and knavish invention. It is clever, but clever with unholy and unblessed self-concealment. Clothing may be a branch of hypocrisy. The coat is not the character.

Ver. 8. **They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day**. It always comes! Creation is not atheistic. All things speak of God, or set him forth in ex-

pressive symbol. Be sure your sin will find you out! Disobedience means self-accusation. To sin is to strike the soul and wound it with great wounds. There is no healing in sin; it is loss, it is disease, it is suicide, it is unquenchable fire! Sin is never more than momentary pleasure. Its very joy has death in the heart of it.

And Adam and his wife hid themselves. Ran away from God, fled from the light. Only virtue can bear the light of day. "Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." The unnaturalness of sin! It drives father and child asunder, it makes confidence impossible. It strains and rends and crushes society. The bad man is always under disguise. He abhors himself; his very decorations may be so many concealments. Wherever you find sinful man you find him hiding himself from God. Sin witnesses against itself.

Ver. 9. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? A new inquiry. The infinite estrangement has taken place. Is there any sadder inquiry in all history? Here we come upon night and sorrow and hell. Sometimes a simple question is the severest judgment. God need not torment us with his Omni-

science, it may be enough to work within the narrow limits of our own self-knowledge. The mystery is in our own self-accusing hearts.

Ver. 10. I was afraid. The first time the word occurs in the Biblical story of mankind. Instructive to mark the entrance of great words into human speech. Sin makes its own words. Take out of speech all the words we owe to sin! Make a list of them—sin, fear, sorrow, pain, shame, grief, death—so runs the horrible, the sickening catalogue. Sin never means real courage. Vice cannot be profoundly and lastingly heroic. Sin is mean, crouching. Purity is never afraid; its heart is as a lion's for courage. Pray for purity.

Ver. 11. Who told thee that thou wast naked? All bad news comes from the devil. Gospels come from God. The voice of discouragement and depression is from below. If ever you feel destitute, broken, mean, afraid, be sure the serpent has been at work, and resist him! Disobedience always means sense of nakedness. The moment after the gratifications of unholy desires we enter into the darkness and fear of self-condemnation. It is but one step into the pit.

Ver. 12. The sinner turning informer. The sinner is cowardly. All beauty withers in his presence.

He cannot be chivalrous. He turns against his own flesh and blood. Your companions in evil will desert you. The tempter will leave you to fight your own battles. He is despicable because he is corrupt.

After divine inquiry comes divine penalty. Punishment is a divine ordinance. Penalty is not the result of excitement or wrath, it is the expression of divine law. It is most important to remember this, lest we suppose that God is a respecter of persons. The sentence is never arbitrary, it is the exact measure of the thing done.

Ver. 14, 15. The great words are spoken to the serpent. An eternal enmity is revealed. Evil is doomed. The woman herself

is avenged, for it is her seed that shall crush the serpent. Even the devil wins poor victories.

He is to be foiled, crushed, and cast into the lake of fire. Here begins the holy war. On which side are we? Be sure the victory is ever with Jesus! Let us fight under the red banner of his Cross.

POINTS.

1. Expect the tempter.
2. He will ask apparently innocent questions.
3. He may be silent and unobtrusive in his approach.
4. He may apparently be doing you a favour!
5. He may appear to enlarge your liberty, your knowledge, and your joy.

CAIN AND ABEL.

GEN. iv. 3-13.

And in process of time. This expression is equal to "In the beginning," in the first verse of Genesis. It does not mean any specific length of time, as a week, or a year, or a decade. It may mean a hundred years, or five hundred. It is important to notice this, because the early events in the Bible are not to be measured by our ideas of time. This religious thought may have lain long in the mind of Cain or Abel. Faculties we do not know of

may yet assert themselves in our mental constitution. We do not know all the possibilities of our own nature. One day we may awaken to be poets, prophets, philanthropists, or to do a kind of service we do not dream of at present. Always believe that there is more in you as to high power and service than you have yet fully realised.

Cain brought an offering.
and Abel brought an offering.

The idea is that of presenting thanks to God. A great wave of love passed over the human heart. We know what it is to have occasional impulses that are tender, gracious, even sublime. All true worship comes from within. Being made after the image of God we instinctively turn towards God. If we fail to do so, it is because we have quenched our original instincts. It is a beautiful thought that the first idea of worship was an idea of thanksgiving, which means giving back to God something that is his own. It means that we have tested life, felt its sweetness, seen the bounty of love by which it is surrounded, and we are anxious to show our thanks to the loving One for all his care and mercy. Worship that does not spring from gratitude will perish like water thrown on the hot sand.

It is also a beautiful thought that each man gave of that substance which came most natural to his hand. Cain gave of the fruit of the earth, and Abel gave of the **firstlings of his flock**. Within all the limits of thanksgiving this is right. Give that which belongs to you. Never covet some other man's way of giving thanks. If your material be poor, give it with a rich love, and it will be accepted. We are tempted to think that if we could

give something very golden, or very precious in any sense, we would certainly give it. There we deceive ourselves. If we do not give that which we have, the probability is we would not give that which is not in our possession. Show how much you would give by giving what you have. If we are faithful over few things, God will make us rulers over many things.

The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect. The difference was not in the things offered, but in the disposition which led to the offering of them. God accepts nothing from the cold hand of reluctance. Whatever is born of true love, God receives with delight, for it is of his own nature. God is love.

Cain was very wroth. It was as if a fire had been kindled in his very soul. He burned. A very fever of wrath inflamed his spirit. What follows shows that we are not dealing with an act of arbitrary sovereignty, but with an act founded upon the nature and spirit characteristic of the offering of Cain. This is a point of infinite importance. God is always prepared to reason the case with us when we are dissatisfied as to the way of his providence. God condescends to

show that his way is equal, and that our way is not equal. Here is an instance of the divine willingness to explain and to expostulate :

Ver. 6, 7. **And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.**

It is clear from these words that the whole blame rested upon Cain himself. This very tendency to sudden wrath indicates a peculiarity of disposition. The nature of Cain was like gunpowder on which a spark had fallen; the spark does not make the powder inflammable, it simply tests the nature of the powder. If a spark had fallen upon water it would have been quenched. All these providences test and reveal the nature of individual men. We are startled by sudden self-revelations; we do not really know ourselves until events arise to test us. We are not a whit better than Cain. We are not assembled here for the purpose either of pitying him or condemning him, but that we may see in him exactly what is in ourselves—in other words, what is in human nature.

Sin lieth at the door. That is to say, sin has been committed ;

the action has become an action of guiltiness; a black mark is set opposite our names in the divine record. The next expression is difficult to understand.

Ver. 7. **And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.**

Does this refer to Abel, or does it refer to the impersonation of sin? Does it mean that if Cain will repent he shall yet retain his birthright and be the ruler, not by mere seniority, but by right of character? There is a primogeniture of love. God may displace the primogeniture of birth, and call to rule and honour those whose hearts abound most in the love which is akin to his own. The Lord may be pointing out to Cain the way back to natural rulership and pre-eminence. That way is always by repentance, confession, self-discipline, and trust in God.

Ver. 8. **And Cain talked with Abel his brother.** There must have been some element of wrath in the conversation. The picture is that of a lion talking to a lamb. When a man has done wrong he is always anxious to put himself right, even by the mean way of revenge. We think that by punishing the meek man we are showing that strength is righteousness. The life of the sinner

is a life of continual self-deceit. He mistakes anger for earnestness and revenge for sincerity. The true rulership is that of self-control. It is better to rule the spirit than to take a city in war. All the great miracles are to be wrought within. We need not look for fields and theatres in which to display our prowess on a great scale; let us fight ourselves, and subdue and annihilate the enemy that is in our own souls.

Ver. 8. And slew him. Sin violates all natural sympathies, relations, and responsibilities. We think that brothers should specially love and honour one another. The history of the human family has shown that natural relationship is no guarantee whatever of unselfish affection. Brothers may be utter strangers to one another. Or the quarrels may be the more desperate and hopeless because of their very brotherhood. This is the first murder in the Bible viewed from an outside point. In reality it is the second murder, only the first murder was made in the heart. The serpent, the devil, "is a murderer from the beginning." He did not vulgarly slay the woman when he tempted her, yet the moment he had succeeded in his temptation he plunged the woman into the chambers of death, where she was swallowed up in great darkness.

Ver. 9. And the Lord said unto Cain. It is the same voice that said unto Adam, "Where art thou?" God inquired for the man in both cases. All loss excites divine inquiry. Who can estimate the meaning of the loss of one soul? God did not say that as he had made one man, he could make a thousand, and thus forget the trifling loss. Every one of us is of consequence to God. Jesus Christ put special value upon the little ones. He spoke of them as if each had a special angel in heaven. Don't think of men in nameless masses, think of them in their individuality, and in their preciousness as specially created living jewels of God.

Am I my brother's keeper?

Yes. Every man is appointed to keep some other man or some other life. We are responsible for one another. This is the very security of society. All men should consider themselves members of a common brotherhood. We should call the roll every night, and ascertain where each loved one is. The Bible never encourages social carelessness. Where is the brother? Where is the broken heart? Where is the orphan? Where are the blind? Before we sleep this should be our family worship to express solicitude, regarding all who are

not under the immediate observation of our watchful love.

Ver. 10. **Thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.** Guilt is not silent. Outraged right is not dumb. There goes up to God a great cry for judgment day by day. A blessed thought is this, that all wrong-doing is known in heaven. Wrong-doing never escapes punishment; it always brings itself to the scaffold. There are no secret murders; no secret wrong-doings; no secret frauds; no secret successes of evil: be sure your sin will find you out. The very ground we tread is on the side of God, and it will report to heaven all the evils we have done upon it. We are living in a great sounding and resounding gallery. We may not hear every note of our own voices, but every note is caught up by the wind and borne into the upper places, and we shall hear it again in denunciation and judgment. The ground into which we have poured human blood will grow only red harvests for us. The ground may refuse to be our servant, because we have outraged its sanctity. He who sins against God sins against every law of nature, and by so much he makes even civilisation itself impossible.

Cain evidently felt his punishment. There is resentfulness

even in his way of accepting it. He would seem to charge God with inflicting upon him excessive penalty. How deceitful is sin! How it enters into our very criticism of God! Who can tell what punishment is due to sin? Only God knows exactly how much fire is due to our guilt. We cannot both commit the sin and fix the penalty. We may operate at one end of the process, but God must come into action at the other. God is the Author of proportion. It is an instructive revelation of ourselves, that we think more of the punishment than we think of the sin. Whilst we are concerning ourselves with the consequences of sin, we cannot truly exercise repentance toward God. We should hate sin, not because of its penal consequences, but because it is an offence against the divine holiness.

POINTS.

1. Notice that both in the case of Adam and of Cain the sin was committed in the midst of circumstances which constituted what is known as a happy environment.

2. This does away with the sophism that if men had better surroundings they would develop better morals. It remains a most significant fact that Adam sinned in a garden, and that Cain sinned in the open field. In the almost-heaven of Eden all nature was

at its best; yet man disobeyed the law of God. Don't suppose that you would be better if you had more money. Don't suppose that men would pray more if they lived in finer houses. I am quite prepared to believe that the finer the house, the poorer the piety. Wealth brings with it more temptations than poverty brings.

3. The sinner always punishes himself. He goes down in the quality of his own soul. An evil

thought cannot pass through the brain without leaving the brain poorer.

4. Remember that murder is not only an act of violence, it is a thought of the heart. "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." Murders proceed out of the heart. How awful to think that it is possible to commit murder without shedding one drop of blood! Sin may never develop into open crime.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH.

GEN. ix. 8-17.

Ver. 9. I establish My covenant. This is the first time we hear of a covenant between God and man. The act of creation was, however, when truly understood, a divine covenant. Everything that is in the Bible is implied in the great word "created." When God creates he means to bring to perfection. To create is to redeem. To redeem is to glorify. We are not to interpret God's acts as we interpret our own. We may act without meaning or purpose; but when God acts he sees the end from the beginning, and knows all that is included in every word he utters.

Notice that it is God himself who establishes his covenant with Noah. Noah does not ask for a covenant, nor does he know the meaning of one. Noah was a

kind of second creation; a kind of Adam on his own account; he seems to come into the world not only by Adamic descent, but by the gate of faith and piety and character. We may think of this covenant as spoken, or written, or as in some way symbolised to the imagination of Noah. We believe that all God's covenants with his saints are in the Bible. There we may see them and peruse them in the light of our later revelation and fuller covenant in Christ. Covenant implies two parties, the maker and the receiver. A covenant is of no use until it has been accepted, and it can be accepted only by the heart.

The covenant with the animals referred to in verse 10 is not unnatural, though from our point

of view it is unintelligible. God made the animals; every one of them is his. They may have a language of their own: into these mysteries we cannot penetrate. But what is known is that God exercises care over the beasts of the field and over the fowls of the air. We must not be cruel to them. We should regard them from a divine point of view. If they were made for our use, or for our pleasure, or our admiration, we should cherish towards them feelings of appreciation and considerateness. God has always shown himself mindful of the lower creation. He has taken care of the bird's nest. He has commanded that the ox treading out the corn shall not be muzzled. He has permitted the Sabbath law to be suspended that the ass may be taken out of the pit. Though man has dominion over the lower creation, that dominion gives him no right to be cruel; it only enlarges the sphere of his beneficence and responsibility.

Ver. 12. And God said, This is the token of the covenant.

The word "token" simply means sign. When we look upon the sign we see the covenant. Signs are meant to be seals, assurances, pledges. The word sign does not necessarily mean miracle. [Read Gen. xvii. 2; Ex. iii. 12; xii. 13; xiii. 16; Num. xvii. 10; Josh. ii. 12; Job xxi. 29;

Isa. xlv. 25.] By comparing these passages we get a tolerably full idea of the word "sign." The sign may be natural or supernatural. God may select any tree of the field, or any star of the night, and fix our religious attention upon it as reminding us of his promises and covenants. This is a high use of nature, and we should avail ourselves of it. We ourselves may look upon the grass that withereth as a sign of our own mortality; we may look upon the enduring stars as a hint of God's constancy; we may look upon the preservation of birds as a sign of fatherly and tender providence. Blessed are we as we thus enrich ourselves with memorials and proofs of our Father's care.

In the case of Noah, the rainbow was to be the sign of the Covenant. This is out of our touch. We cannot lay our fingers upon it and spoil it. It follows the storm, and is a sign of peace; it unites all colours, and thus represents the whiteness which is the best image of purity. Imagination may take fire whilst gazing upon such signs, and may construe them into their highest meaning. In this exercise how large does the divine revelation become, how radiant, how accessible!

How full of significance is the fact that Noah built an altar upon

the reappearing earth. In the new world there was an altar before there was a house. This is in right sequence, for God himself lived before his creation; so should his altar precede all the other erections of mankind. That altar, when enlarged into its fullest meaning, means a sanctuary wide as the earth and as unlimited as the human family.

Was there, then, a new human nature? No. Adam survived in Noah. The first temptation was from without, in the form of a serpent; the second was a temptation from within, as an exercise of imagination. Here, then, we have the old nature with new temptations. The serpent is not dead.

God promises no more to smite **every living** thing. Mere destruction is always a failure. Destruction may be necessary, but it is never an instrument of regeneration. We think that if we see another man suffer we shall certainly not repeat the sin that brought the suffering upon him. Herein we deceive ourselves, for we go with wide open eyes into the path of old iniquities and into the pit of old punishments. Though God will not any more smite every living thing he has surrounded all life with the most solemn sanctions. He

has set his seal upon human life as peculiarly his own. No man can be slain with impunity. In the old dispensation if an ox gored a man, that ox was to be killed. Notice how God has always been careful about human life. "Of every man's brother will I require the life of man," God required from Cain the life of the murdered Abel. Already we see the outline of the great redemption.

POINTS.

Sin will always bring punishment. God does not say he will no longer punish the sinner. He is simply talking about one particular method of punishment. It was natural that the world, which had sinned against him, should be destroyed. Yet in wrath he remembered mercy. He preserved unto himself a seed. But for the preservation of this seed, providence would have confessed itself to have been an utter failure. For man to be man he must have liberty to sin. No man has a right to sin, yet every man is free to sin. This is, of course, a great mystery, but so is human nature itself. The Bible does not create the mysteries, it simply points them out, and where it can do so it throws light upon their darkness. All these outward tragedies of fire and water only point to a greater tragedy within the soul itself. Whoever sins knows that he dies,

This lesson has been before us already this new year. It will be something if we come to learn that heaven and hell are within us in no insignificant degree. The rainbow is no longer the sign of our covenant, though we may use it for many ideal purposes. The great sign of our covenant is the cross of Christ. Its base is deeper than our sin; its arms stretch out beyond the bounds of our prodigality. The cross was in eternity. It was only revealed in time. Jesus Christ is the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. Notice how the religious

always goes first. God before creation. The altar before the house. Intercourse with God before commerce with man. Religion is the Alpha and Omega of human consciousness. No man can depose it permanently to a second place. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Don't allow yourself to be puzzled by the miracle of the Flood, but solemnly direct your attention to the fact that in some way or other, at some time or other, God will lay his hand heavily upon sin, and that his heel will crush the serpent's head.

BEGINNING OF THE HEBREW NATION.

GEN. xii. 1-9.

Now the Lord had said unto Abram. When? The form of the grammar is significant. We do not always know the precise moment with which the revelation comes. God may have secretly communicated with the heart. We may call these communications impressions, or impulses, or even instincts; it is much better for us to recognise the religious ministries that are constantly appearing upon the human mind, and to speak of them definitely as divine visions and elections.

Men can only do great things as the result or expression of great inspirations. Rely upon it, if ever

you are moved to do anything noble, generous, heroic, or self-sacrificing, the Spirit of God has been speaking to your heart, and has been calling you to great service. We know the true Voice when we hear it. God never calls us to anything little or contemptible. Divine calls are always towards the great, the noble, and the redemptive.

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house. These are tender pronouns. There is something more than grammar in these words: "Thy country," "th kindred," "thy father's house,"—

all these terms show that it was no small sacrifice that Abram was called upon to make. He was to be more than a patriot, more than a kinsman, more than a son in one father's house. God is thus continually enlarging our personality. He would make us larger men. He wishes us to take an interest in the whole world. There is nothing little in the divine conception of human relationship and influence. As we belong to God, we belong to one another. God having made us all, we are all related, and are bound together by very subtle and pressing responsibilities. We may have to give up a good deal, but it is the kind of giving up which results in larger ownership.

Unto a land that I will show thee. Blessed are they who only go to such a land. God knows every land, and where he would like us to be, and where we can do the most good, and if he will only show us the land, his very showing of it shall turn that land into a sweet home. Our one desire should be to reside where God would have us take up our abode. We must get out of the little notion that God respects one country more than another, or that one country is more God's than another country. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." Our temptation is to seek out our own abodes. We think we will go forth, and explore, and

discover, and annex; whereas we should simply await a divine communication, and having received it, we should straightway go and take possession of the promised land.

We have seen that Abram had to give up a good deal—namely, his country, his kindred, and his father's house. Obedience is tested by sacrifice. It is a poor obedience that allows us to have all our own way, without loss or pain or trial of any kind. On the other hand, whilst Abram had to give up a good deal, let us see what Abram had to receive.

I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great. Now on which side is the balance of advantage? Whatever we give to God we receive again a hundredfold. We cannot give more than he will repay. We must indeed remember that our country and our kindred and our father's house are God's gifts to us. We have nothing that we have not received. Abram might have said, when he gave up his country, his kindred, and his father's house, "Of thine own have I given thee." See now how God takes the case into his own hands! It is a case of compensation, a case of giving much for little; an instance which hints at the great reward which awaits all sacrifice and labour

offered and done in the name of Christ. Abram was like a flower planted by the hand of God, which was to grow to great beauty: or he was like a seedling rooted by the divine hand in a congenial soil, which was to grow up into a great tree. God found Abram little, and promised to make him great. Mark that all this promise was founded upon obedience. Abram was to do something as the ground upon which God would proceed. If we have not done anything, we have no right to expect peculiar blessings from heaven.

But more than this was to be the reward of Abram:—

And thou shalt be a blessing.

Abram was not only to receive much, he was to be a medium through which much passed to others. We do not receive blessings that we may detain them, but that we may hand them on to the ever-coming generations. God said to Abram, "Be thou a Blessing." God thus makes fountains of beneficence in the wilderness. There are men who seem to be trustees of the very bounty of God. From them we expect the leading word, the kindly light, the sympathy which gives strength to all travellers and workers. One man differs from another in the degree in which he can be beneficent. Whilst in a sense some men are givers and other men are

receivers, yet in the larger sense who ever is capable of receiving is capable of giving.

Was this all that Abram received in response to his obedience? Let us see:—

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Now we may see who had the advantage of this transaction. Does man ever exceed God? It would seem as if Abram gave the Lord one cup of cold water, and that the Lord returned rivers of blessings into the heart of Abram. Thus faith is tried. Thus obedience becomes part of our daily education. The better we can obey, the better shall we rule.

Notice how all these promises and actions are directly connected with God's own personality. Read the list: "I will show thee"; "I will make of thee"; "I will bless thee." It is all God's doing. He gives us a definite word on which to plead our life, and we have a right to plead that definite word in the time of danger and fear. We are rich in divine promises. Why do we not claim them as fine gold, and expend them in the nurture and strengthening of our souls? It is instructive to observe that not only will God bless his people, but he will oppose himself

to those who stand as hindrances in their way. He will not treat good and evil as though they were one and the same thing. His face is hardened towards the enemy, whilst it smiles lovingly and tenderly upon all those who put their trust in him. Nor does the blessing end here. Read:—

In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. This is going to be a great beginning! How much may flow from one apparently simple action! How little we know what we are really doing in life! When Ruth came to Naomi, she little thought that she was to be the mother of Christ. In many ways God shows the unity of the human family. It is a very remarkable phrase, this: "In thee shall all." Thus we are all connected. Thus our blessings come down to us from ancient times. Who can find the river-head of the blessings he enjoys, unless, indeed, he find it in the living God?

So Abram departed. Observe him as an inspired man! He is rich because he possesses a divine promise. He has an abundance of this world's wealth, but that would only be a ghastly poverty, if behind and beneath it there were not the living Word beating, as it were, with the pulses of divine life.

Nor was Abram a young man

when he undertook this journey. **Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.** Patriarchally, that might be a youthful age, but in no sense was it an age of inexperience and merely wanton enthusiasm. It was the youth of maturity. It was the maturity of youth. God does not impose upon our childishness; he makes a direct appeal to our manliness, our experience, and our sense of responsibility. Speak great words of a man if you expect great deeds from him. The flowers of the heart open widely under the sunshine of encouragement.

And Lot went with him. Yes, in the body. We are not sure that Lot's soul was in this pilgrimage. Many persons are physically in the Church who are not there sympathetically. Lot went forth under a smaller policy with a meaner expectation. He was not lifted up into a passion of divine enthusiasm. Abram was a great leader; Lot was a calculating follower. It was a beautiful band, taken as a whole, was this band of pilgrims.

And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and all the souls that they had gotten in Haran. That was the caravan.

"The souls that they had gotten" may refer to the dependents and the slaves of the household; they may refer to the proselytes which they had made; they may refer to persons who had voluntarily attached themselves to the pilgrim train. They all came into the land of Canaan. The whole journey was about three hundred miles—more than three thousand might now be accounted of! The course was slow, laborious, and exacting. So evermore is the whole course of human obedience. It is not to be passed over by leaps and bounds. It is to be trodden foot by foot and inch by inch.

And Abram passed through the land into the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. The word "Sichem" means shoulder, and may refer to a ridge which connected the two well-known mountains Ebal and Gerizim. The word "plain" means "the oak of Moreh." Strange events took place within the shade of this oak. [Read Gen. xxxv. 4; Josh. xxiv. 26; Judges ix. 6.] The word "Moreh" means teacher. If we think of the plain of Moreh as the oak of the teacher, or the oak where the teacher taught, we seem to have here the image of a school and sanctuary, the very beginning of a most complete religious apparatus.

The Canaanite was then in the land. Does this point to the enmity which all great movements have to overcome? Have not we to effect great displacements before we can commence the lasting construction? Need displacement be associated with cruelty or vindictiveness or meanness of any kind? Certainly not. The way of the Lord is otherwise, and his way alone is right.

And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give the land. This is the first time that anything like a visible appearance of the deity is referred to in Scripture. In other instances the command seems to have been given spiritually. Up to this point the medium between God and man seems to be represented by the voice (Gen. ii. 16; iii. 8, 9; iv. 6-9; vi. 13; vii. 1). In all these instances what was done was done through the medium of a voice. Commanding, saying, calling, and speaking. Now we come upon an appearance. Who appeared? Was it Christ himself? Before such a wonder we may well be silent.

And there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. It would seem as if a visible deity required a visible altar. There must be some external proof of our fellowship

with the Unseen. Man is body as well as soul, and, therefore, he must give visible embodiment of his religious aspirations and enthusiasms. A beautiful idea is it that the land was taken possession of by the altar. It was a religious ownership. By-and-by the Lord will claim the whole earth, not only in the power of his own sovereignty, but with the consent of his own people. He only can adequately handle the earth. He knows its whole secret and the purpose he had in view in setting it among the stars. He only, therefore, can

bring it to such perfection of flower and fruit as will satisfy all nations. Let us walk in his ministry. When inspirations fail, let service halt. Organisation should stand still when life recedes.

Are we not on a pilgrimage? Whose pilgrims are we? To what end are we hastening? Foolish is he, and contemptible, who knows not on what destiny he is bent. Let us declare plainly that we seek a country out of sight, a Canaan large as heaven! To that blest Canaan Christ is the living way.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM.

GEN. xvii. 1-9.

Abram was ninety years old and nine. At this period Ishmael was thirteen years old. How dear Ishmael was to Abram is shown by the eighteenth verse of this chapter. Consider the case in detail:

The Lord appeared to Abram. We never know the meaning of these appearances. The idea of personality is, however, most distinct. The action is one of intelligence, purpose, and identification. Whether by some personal outline, or in a shining vision, or by some thrilling whisper, we cannot say; enough that Abram himself was able to distinguish

the supernatural appearance. Every one of us may have some way of knowing that God is nigh at hand. We should, however, test even our deepest assurances, lest we be led away by false impression or selfish desire. Whenever self-sacrifice is involved we may be assured that the call is not from earth, but from heaven.

I am the Almighty God. Such assurance is needed for the comfort of human weakness. We all need great, broad declarations on which to found conduct that expresses faith and religious purpose. There are times when the sinner feels that he needs all the

blood of Christ to cleanse away his black and shameful guilt. There are also times when we feel that we need the whole Almightiness of God in order to sustain us in some great toil or sacrifice. It is not enough that God should have simply sufficient power; he must have all power; must be power upon power enlarging itself into Almightiness. God gives us this assurance, and we may build upon it as upon a rock that cannot be moved.

In this case it is remarkable that God clothes himself with his Almightiness, not to sustain a man who is about to endure a trial, but one to whom he is about to communicate an exceeding great and precious promise. We at once see how much we need divine power to help us to receive a message that signifies suffering or loss, or in severe testing of faith. In this case Abram needed the assurance of Almightiness on the part of God in order to redeem a most wonderful promise. Exultation has its perils as well as depression. Riches close quite as many gates as they open. Do not suppose that all the joy lies on the side of fulness. There is a famine that helps us to enlarge our prayers.

Walk before me, and be thou perfect. God always insists upon character as the basis of promise.

He never entrusts the fool with any special blessing. To wickedness God commits no trusts. We must, under divine direction, prove ourselves to be in some measure worthy of the blessings which God is willing to bestow. God always calls us to discipline. God does not say that Abram, having done so much already, is counted worthy of a new proof of divine care. Every day is to be a day of watchfulness. We are to live up to the measure of our present opportunities. Not what we did yesterday, but what we do to-day, is the real test of character and progress. It is always so with God: we must work with both hands diligently; He himself may be here before the next rising of the sun; let us, therefore, watch, and wait, and hope. Does all this discipline go for nothing? Let us read:—

And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

God's covenant is God's oath. God's covenant involves every attribute of his being. He does not give his loved ones part of himself; he gives them, so to say, his whole self, his wealth of power and wisdom and love. Notice how God will multiply Abram. He will not make him into two or three; his words are: "I will multiply thee exceedingly." As

the stars of the sky shall be the household of Abram. As the sand upon the sea-shore shall be the hosts of those who will in the long run sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Ver. 3. **And Abram fell on his face.** He was not carried away with foolish excitement. He retained his sobriety of mind, and bowed himself down with adoration and thankfulness. A beautiful word is this: **And thou shalt be a father of many nations.** Abram was to hear the going and the coming of a great multitude of men. The moving about of these hosts is represented by a great din, as of a tumultuous throng hastening to some desired and happy issue. Yet God claims that Abram is but the intermediate progenitor of those nations. God points out his own personal sovereignty. His language is always: "I am"; "My covenant"; "I make"; and "I will establish." After all, we are but divine mediums. We are the agents of God. God never allows us to think of ourselves as independent creations. We are his servants, and through us he works out his will.

Ver. 5. **Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham.** Abram means "high father." Abraham means "father

of a multitude." To the eye this makes little difference. To the soul it signifies a vital distinction. Abram is personal: Abraham is federal. The man Abram was but one—limited, obscure, unimportant; but the man Abraham is to be king and priest and leader, no longer considering himself in his singularity, but looking upon all his hosts in their plurality and diversity.

Ver. 6. **And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.** What a roll of sovereignty there is in these words! It is like thunder set to religious music! Notice always the first personal pronoun. God never divides his sovereignty in the sense of impairing his own. He calls us to co-operation, but he never unseats himself. He is evermore on the throne. We can live, therefore, wisely and beneficently only as we live in prayer. Even the father of kings must needs submit to discipline.

Great things are connected with small human names. So it would seem; but in reality those small human names are immediately and vitally connected with the Name Eternal. Not what we are, but what God is, should be looked upon as the guarantee of the future. God is legislating for

humanity. Even if Abraham should play him false, God will bring his own purposes to fruition. Notice how in ver. 7 God throws his mind over all generations, and how he promises not a covenant only, but "an everlasting covenant." Throughout the Bible there is a wonderful consistency between what may be called the quality of God and the promises of God. It is because of what God is that his promises are what they are. God's word is God's self. He is everlasting, and, therefore, his covenant is without end of days.

Notice that in ver. 8 there is a gift which was to be received as a kind of seal of the promise. In the olden days God gave men land, because that was one of the gifts which they could immediately recognise and appreciate. God now gives the Holy Ghost, which is the Spirit of promise and the Spirit of purity. There are no outward signs of our election; but "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

The sign of the covenant was circumcision. The flesh must be humbled. Our blessings must be connected with pain. They are so to-day. What we hold we hold for others. We must surrender it, though we love it, and the degree in which we love it indicates the value of the surrender.

At some point every man must be made to feel that "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." We do not hold the kingdom of heaven on cheap or easy terms. Its symbol is a cross. The way to holiness and heaven is the way of crucifixion.

POINTS.

1. The 17th chapter records the renewal of a covenant. There have been thirteen years of waiting. There have been thirteen years of mortification for Sarah! There have been thirteen years of discipline for Abram, and Hagar, and Ishmael.

2. The change of name in the case of Sarah meant the same thing as the change of name in the case of Abram. Sarai means "my princess," but Sarah means simply "princess," without the limited word my. Sarah was to be the mother of nations.

3. Here we come more into the centre of household life. Up to this time there have been practically no children before us. Now we come upon the great sacrament of the consecration of children: "He that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you."

4. It is not needful that we should understand all that we do religiously, or all that is done

for us. Many blessings come without our interposition or will or concurrence; we have nothing to do with the rising of the sun, the falling of the rain, or with any of the great mysteries of Nature; God therein works alone. So it is right that he should do many things, and require many things from us, that we do not understand. We are his and not our own: let him do with us as seemeth good in his sight.

5. It would seem as if this was God's way of saying, "Suffer little children to come unto me." There is no instance in the Bible of God's indifference to little children. Jesus Christ paid special attention to them, and turned them into symbols of his own kingdom. God does not always address himself to our intelligence; he always addresses himself to our necessity. I do not know what God is doing with my life, but because it is his I know that the end will be good. My daily prayer shall be, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."

One might think that these appearances to Abraham would have been forgotten amid all the infinite administration of the universe. Whether this was so or not, read Ex. vi. 3. With regard to the largeness of the divine promises, read Eph. iii. 20. In the Old Testament read Gen. xiii. 16, and also Gen. xxii. 17. This rite of circumcision was not unnoticed by the New Testament writers. Paul founds an argument upon it. [Read Rom. iv. 12.] We must never forget as an illustration of the inspired character of the Old Testament that it was quoted in the New. As an instance of this, read Rom. iv. 16, 17. The first persons referred to in the New Testament were not ashamed to quote such promises as we have in the text. [Read Luke i. 54, 55]. Paul did not regard these Old Testament personalities and covenants as relics of a cherished dispensation. In proof of Paul's use of the earliest records, read Rom. ix. 7-9. In contrast to the promise of Canaan, read 1 Pet. i. 4.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON SODOM.

GEN. xviii. 22-33.

The judgment upon Sodom should be read in connection with the verses immediately preceding. In ver. 17 we come upon a most important inquiry, "Shall I hide

from Abraham that thing which I do?" There is a continual communication between the divine and the human. Never think that the way between

heaven and earth is blocked up or impassable. If ever God could commune with the creatures which he made in his own image and likeness, he can commune with them to-day. We are not to define the only method by which God can make known his will to men. It may be by dream or vision or impression; he may come suddenly, he may come unexpectedly, he may come through avenues or ministries of whose very existence we have no knowledge. The supreme thing which we have to do is to realise the fact that God does now make known his will to the hearts of those who deeply love him. This doctrine is borne out by several passages: Ps. xxv. 14; Amos iii. 7; John xv. 15.

The Lord not only asks the question, he lays down the line of reasoning by which he proceeded:

"Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" God will balance one great gift by another. He does not make Abraham supreme at one point and degrade him at some other point. The original blessing carried all detail blessings. God's promises contain in germ all the blessings of the same quality and arising out of the same line. [Read Gal. iii. 8; iii. 25.] See

from passages like these how the Old Testament is confirmed and illustrated by the New, and see how impossible it would be to have a New Testament but for the prophecies and promises of the Old.

This communication of the divine secret was not only based upon a divine blessing, it was founded also upon God's knowledge of the character of the man to whom he was about to entrust an awful secret.

Ver. 19. **For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.** This is another proof that we hold our blessings conditionally. A man who is faithful in his own house will be faithful in the Church of God. It would seem as if God looked upon the training of children as a revelation of the father's own character. Blessing has always rested upon the families that have been united in religious inquiry and service. The children have never been excluded, in the divine purpose, from the Father's blessing. If the children are to be blessed with the fathers, they must be

made to feel that they are a vital part of the household. [Read Deut. xxxii. 46; iv. 9, 10; vi. 7; Josh. xxiv. 15; Prov. vi. 20 Eph. vi. 4.]

In ver. 22 the great judgment begins. Abraham stood before Jehovah. In the second verse of the chapter we read that three men stood before Abraham at the tent door. In ver. 16 two of the men rose up and looked towards Sodom. In ver. 22 we read that **Abraham stood yet before the Lord**. The two angels went on their way; Jehovah tarried behind. Is there any meaning in the number three in this instance? Is there any reference to the Trinity? These are questions which the mind cannot escape, but which cannot be definitely settled by chapter and verse. My own mind is satisfied when I think of these three figures representing the Triune Godhead. Before making the secret known to Abraham, the Lord once more showed that he was proceeding upon reasons that could be stated to the understanding and the conscience of his servant. Read ver. 20, then read ver. 21, as showing how carefully God goes into the evidence before he proceeds to judgment.

In ver. 23 we have a most pathetic picture:

And Abraham drew near,

and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? It did not occur to Abraham that the whole city could be unfaithful. He certainly thought that a few uncorrupted souls might be found even in the worst population. The spirit which underlies Abraham's inquiry is quite familiar in the religious history of mankind, as given in the Bible. God may often perplex human reason, but he never shocks the human conscience. He must make the righteousness of his judgment as clear to men who love him as it is to his own mind. This is another proof that man was made in the image and likeness of God. [Read Jer. xii. 1; Num. xvi. 22; 2 Sam. xxiv. 17.] Who can entreat with God for sinful men? We can only pray for others with any effect in the degree in which we ourselves are accounted obedient. Only the pure can pray for the sinful. [Read Heb. x. 22.] Jesus Christ is the one Advocate. In him is no sin: therefore he could make reconciliation between offending man and the offended God.

Abraham fixes the possible number of the righteous within the city of Sodom at fifty. **Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy and not spare the**

place for the fifty righteous that are therein? God allows us to show our idea of righteousness and mercy. He also allows us to treat any case of disobedience and crime as if we were more merciful than himself. His ministry amongst us is wholly educational. He permits us to give free expression to our instincts and our most benevolent impulses. Abraham could not think that God would slay the righteous with the wicked, and Abraham was right. Whatever evil may befall the righteous in common with the wicked, ample compensation will be found in divine providence here or hereafter. Abraham propounds a great question:—

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? This is a very pregnant inquiry. First, it gives God his right place as the Judge of all the earth; second, it shows that the Judge of all the earth will do right, how conflicting and terrible soever may be the intermediate processes. Abraham had this deep conviction in his heart, and by it he judged all the providence of God. We also must have central standards, inflexible faiths, living and immutable convictions by which we test and judge the whole way of God. Unless we have one such permanent faith we shall stumble amid the perplexity and darkness

of interminable details. [Read Job viii. 20; Isa. iii. 10-12; Ps. lviii. 2; Job viii. 3; xxxiv. 17.]

The Lord was ready to meet Abraham on his own terms. If he found fifty men in Sodom who were righteous, the city should be spared on their account. Abraham then lowered the number to forty-five; from forty-five he came to forty, from forty he came to thirty, from thirty he came to twenty, and from twenty he came to ten. The pity of God followed all the descent of numbers. It was Abraham himself who stopped. Imagination wonders what would have been the issue if the ten had been dropped to five. Sometimes I have ventured to wonder what would have been the issue if Abraham had ventured to ask that the city should have been spared for his own sake? It would have been like God to spare Sodom simply for the reason that his chosen servant had pleaded for the city. We do know that God has spared many for the sake of one. He did so, for example, in the case of Paul and shipwreck on the Adriatic Sea. But Abraham closed his prayer, and the Lord went his way. Oh! those goings away of the Blessed One! When Jesus turns away from a man, the man's soul is already in outer darkness. "Seek ye the Lord while he may

be found ; call ye upon him while he is near."

POINTS.

1. Learn from this instance the great doctrine of mutual intercession. Men pray for one another. The idea finds its highest meaning in the intercession of the Son of God. He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

2. Sodom shows what human nature is when it is left to itself. He who casts out God degrades his own soul and starts it on a process of corruption.

3. There comes a time when destruction is all that is left even to divine wisdom and mercy. God never avails himself of destructive agencies until he has exhausted all moral means. He remonstrates with us ; he pleads with us, as if we were essential to his happiness ; he forewarns us of the issues of sin, if haply he might affright us. Then comes a time when even conscience declares that destruction alone is left as an expression of divine righteousness. Conscience says this is right ! In the final judgment for sin, righteous men shall have a sense of rest. They will know that nothing has been left undone that the tenderest love could devise. The great men

of old who knew the way of the Lord, and had followed its course with trembling reverence, sang most loudly and sweetly of the goodness of God : " The Lord is gracious and full of compassion ; slow to anger and of great mercy." " The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." " The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." In the sum-total of things it will be seen that mercy has rejoiced against judgment, and all nations shall unite in the exclamation, " God is love."

4. See in this instance God's thought concerning sin. He cannot allow it. He cannot have it in any corner of his universe. Holiness and sin cannot live together. The Lord has never changed his view of sin. The whole world became a guilty Sodom, and Jesus Christ came down to save it. Men may either accept this salvation or reject it. Sin is selfishness. These are the terms in which the sin of Sodom is described : " Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness, was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me ; therefore I took them away as I saw good." God is not indifferent to the moral

character of his creatures. He will not allow evil to overrun his purpose and turn it to disappointment and failure. Though he bear long with the sinner,

though he be verily a God long-suffering, yet there comes a time when he will seize his sword and avenge himself of the enemy of men.

TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

GEN. xxii. 1-13.

God did tempt Abraham.

The word "tempt" must not be taken in a bad sense, as in the case of the serpent and Eve. It simply means proved, tried, tested. The Lord wanted to know the quality of Abraham. Thus he is trying men every day. Thus he reveals men to themselves. By virtue of his omniscience he knows everything concerning us, and yet there is a sense in which we are permitted to inform God, as if we were contributing something to his knowledge. We are entreated to tell him everything, to keep back nothing from him, to make him, as it were, our confidant. All these methods of divine education are intended simply to show us what we are in reality. A peculiar blessing is attached to those who are thus tempted, and who endure the temptation well. [Read Jas. i. 12.] That we may know exactly the meaning of our trial, read 1 Pet. i. 7. In the ancient time it was God's almost daily way to put his people to the test. [Read Deut. xiii. 3.] But will God permit us

to be overborne? He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. Will he suit the temptation to our strength, or will he overwhelm us by his own almightiness? In answer to this inquiry, read 1 Cor. x. 13.

Said unto him, Abraham.

Abraham knew the voice of the Lord. The insertion of the name in this way is full of religious significance. It is true through all the ages that the people of God know the voice of God. There is wonderful tenderness in being called by name. Jesus called Zacchæus. Jesus called Mary by her name, and instantly she knew him. God employs the very tones of the voice as ministers of grace. God makes personal appeals, direct and urgent, to the heart of each man. Each man has his peculiar trials. No man could endure the trials of any other man. God measures all things; he sets bounds to our habitation; he numbers the very hairs of our head.

Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest. There was no mistake about the person meant. There is agony in each syllable. The Lord gives Isaac his full title and style. The reference was not to some man, but to one man. God often defines our trials; so to say, he puts his finger upon them, and bidding us look at the object, he says in effect, "This is what I want; this, let there be no mistake about it. There is not something else equal to it; I want this one particular thing, and no other." "Take now thy son" would have been severe enough. But Ishmael having gone, Isaac was the "only son." This would have been severe enough. But the Lord adds, as if to complete the agony, "whom thou lovest." We cannot wriggle out of the divine commands. God will not allow us to avail ourselves of ambiguities. He puts himself in divine relation to our character and our circumstances and our necessities, and he insists upon our following out his idea, and not our own. A very solemn word was this "only son." Where else do we find that expression? Do we not find it only in connection with Jesus Christ himself, who is the only begotten Son of the Father?

And offer him there for a burnt offering. How abhorrent

to the divine nature! Is he not here countenancing human sacrifices? Not in reality, but in appearance only. We must not stop the reading here as if this were final. The instance is not to be taken word by word, but as a whole, and not until we come to the end of it can we understand the meaning of any of its parts.

Get thee into the land of Moriah. Where do we find any other reference to this land? [Read 2 Chron. iii. 1.]

And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son. There was no delay in Abraham's obedience. In all moral duty delay is ruin. If the tempter can only gain time, he will gain his purpose also. Man must act straightway. You will remember that when the king gave out his goods to his servants, the wise man straightway went and traded with the same. There is a moral advantage in immediateness. Whilst we are most conscious of the divine presence, we should throw ourselves into the divine service. In a day or two the vision may fade. By the time of the setting of the sun the enemy may get some advantage over us. Let us, therefore, begin

the day with divine service. "Early in the morning"; this is the time when God makes himself especially precious to us. The opening day is an opening flower handed to us from the garden of God. Early in the day we have not suffered from the day's temptation. God often appointed an early morning as the time for special communion. He did so in the case of Moses whom he appointed to meet early in the morning on the top of the mountain, that they might converse in the white dawn and amongst the sparkling dew. Always seize the opening day for God. What morning is to the day, youth is to life. I therefore affectionately urge you now, in the very morning of your time, to obey the divine will, and seek the face of God if you would really succeed in life, and in life's evening enjoy the light of the divine favour.

And clave the wood for the burnt offering. Everything was done immediately. There was wood enough in the land of Moriah, but the mere gathering of it might give time for some inferior temptation to work. They took the wood with them. On the mountain there was to be no distraction of thought. Here, again, we see the advantage of immediateness, definiteness, decision, and detailed preparation.

Leave nothing at loose ends. The preparation really means the sacrifice. He who can do the preparation well, will not fail in the final agony. The carrying of the wood with them suggested to the early Fathers a parallel between Isaac carrying the wood, and Jesus carrying the cross. Whilst we may not spiritualise too much, there is always a danger that we may spiritualise too little. Let us cultivate a reverent attention, and God will reward that attention by showing us many symbols and parallels and hints which are withheld from the cold and narrow wisdom of this world.

On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off. Wonderful things are spoken of the third day in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ said, "I must work to-day, and to-morrow; and the third day I shall be perfected." He challenged those who were round about him to destroy the Temple, and he would build it again in three days. "He was buried rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 4). The people were encouraged to return unto the Lord on the third day, and he would bind them up. I will not indicate the precise prophecy in which this exhortation is to be found, further than by telling you that it is in one of

the minor prophets; and I ask you to search the Scriptures, and discover the verse for yourself.

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. There is a parting of the ways in all life. There are great duties in life which man can only do in solitude. We read concerning death that there is no discharge in that war. Consultation may be useful, but there is a time when conference can aid us no further, and we must begin the monologue of agony. Jesus was wont to withdraw himself. Sometimes he was absolutely alone in his communion with God. At other times he took three of his favoured ones, and they spent their time in fellowship with the heavenlies. We do not do our best work in the presence of the multitude. The multitude may distract our thoughts, or rob them of their purest bloom. If a preacher would handle the multitude effectively, he must first spend a good deal of his time alone. If you would handle the day's work with great capableness and happy effect, you must spend the morning hours with the living Fountain of all wisdom and strength and grace. What we are really in solitary communion,

that we shall be when we come to the battle and the crisis.

Away Abraham and Isaac went on their silent course. Abraham could not speak, for his heart was full. How long they went together, and how silently, none may tell. There are some things we must not speak of. Silence is itself a trial. If we could speak of some sorrows we might mitigate their agony. Behold, in these two travellers, the man who knows and the man who does not know; age full of bitter wisdom, youth full of curious wonder. These are the companionships of life. We meet them every day. They mark off human experience into two permanent classes.

In the seventh verse Isaac breaks the silence. He did not say, "Abraham," as the Lord said it; but he exclaimed, "My father." It was the voice of childhood; it was the inquiry of affection; it was the expression of natural and perhaps painful wonder. Isaac said, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" This was the inquiry of agony. It is the inquiry of all the ages. Blood and fire enter into the very substance and structure of human life and progress. Whether we give them theological interpretations or not, there they are, indicating tragedy, expressing

pain that will force itself into speech, indicating dissatisfaction with all commonplace and all surface explanations. The lamb and the burnt offering are not ecclesiastical innovations; they are original and primary ideas; they are clothed with the venerableness of eternity.

The answer which Abraham returned was simply an inspired reply. Consider it very carefully in this light. God provided, not only the lamb, but the answer. What was Abraham's reply? "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." That is the eternal truth. That is what we mean by trust in the supernatural. No lamb had been provided by Abraham; no lamb was in sight, no lamb was available, from a human point of view. What, then, remains in this group of difficulties? One resource remains, and that resource is God. How often is that one thing forgotten! The fool forgot it when he reckoned up his goods, and promised his soul year after year of the idleness which he called "rest." "But the Lord said unto him, Thou fool!" Never omit the religious element from your calculations. Sometimes that element comes in to deprive us, as in the case of the rich fool, of anticipated blessings; sometimes it comes into life to supply defects, to relieve cruel pressure,

and to scatter the darkness by shafts of morning light.

Abraham built the altar, and laid the wood in order. The strain upon him was becoming unbearable. He walked with urgent haste, almost in a fury of passionate devotion. If he gave himself one moment for consideration, he might fail in his great trial. Isaac was laid upon the altar; the knife was uplifted; in another moment red blood had flowed; but it is just in these critical moments that God interposes, and it is in these critical moments that the sacrifice is made complete. "And the angel of the Lord said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son—thy only son from me." As to the binding of Isaac, and the sufferings of Jesus, we might compare this passage with Isaiah liii. 7; Matt. xxvii. 2; Phil. ii. 8; John x. 17, 18.

The incident has been explained away by some persons who have been horrified by the idea of Abraham slaying his son in any literal sense. But first of all, Abraham did not slay his son. Secondly, if he had slain his son in obedience to a divine commandment, we must remember that Isaac was God's son before he was Abraham's. God would

only be asking for his own gift back again. It is evident, however, from references in the New Testament, the Apostles regarded the incident as literal history. In proof of this, read Heb. xi. 17-19; also James ii. 21-24. It is really not great interpretation that explains such history into mere cloud and air. We are not dealing with idealism or romantic poetry, but with the stern, overwhelming tragedies of life. Why should we turn into barren verse what God meant for disciplinary prose? True, we have now come under another dispensation. Trials like this are not now literally called for. Have we then altogether escaped the dispensation of trial? Is faith no longer severely tested? I venture to say that faith is more severely strained to-day than it ever was in the ancient times. The strain is now spiritual. The obedience is precisely the same, but the method of its proof has undergone very great change. [Read 1 Sam. xv. 22; Mic. vi. 7, 8.] If we diligently and lovingly try to obey God in our own circumstances, we shall feel that we are

subjected to trials compared with which many external devotions were of a commonplace order: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." "If thine hand offend thee, cut it off." Murder, adultery, theft, all evil, are in the heart. The great trial is to take place within as well as without.

The whole story points emblematically to the gift of Jesus Christ our Saviour. He is the Lamb provided by God. He is the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world. We must not seek any other atonement. There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Have we accepted his sacrifice? Have we been crucified with Christ? Do we bear about with us the print of the nails in our hands and feet? These are the questions that must search us as with fire, and upon our answer to them will our destiny depend.

SELLING THE BIRTHRIGHT.

GEN. xxv. 27-34.

Ver. 27. **The boys grew.** The boys were Esau and Jacob. The word Esau comes from a word which signifies "to make." The

idea of well-made is connected with the use of the word. Others consider that Esau is equivalent to "hairy." When Esau was born,

he was, according to ver. 25, **red all over like an hairy garment**. The Hebrew word for "red" is *admoni*. The word Edom has been traced to this Hebrew form. The name Jacob signifies one who follows at another's heels. Some commentators trace the use of this signification very curiously. In Hos. xii. 3 we are told that the Hebrew is, he Jacobed, he heeled, in other words, he was so cunning that he got the better of his brother even before his brother was born. When we say that one man is constantly following the heels of another, we mean that he is pursuing him with the idea of bearing him down.

Esau was a cunning hunter. A man of the field. This does not mean that he was a farmer, but that he was a man who loved what we call sport. He lived in the open air. All his delights were on the mountains and in the forests and in the green fields.

Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. The word which is rendered "plain" in this verse is rendered "perfect" in Job i. 1, and in Ps. xxxvii. 37. Probably neither translation expresses the exact meaning of the original. That idea is, on the whole, upright, representing a general integrity. Sometimes the name is better than the man; sometimes the man is better than

the name. In Cain and Abel we had a strong contrast; in Esau and Jacob we have a contrast quite as strong. When we think of Esau we think of a kind of freebooter, a roving, jovial, open-hearted man. When we think of Jacob we think of a domestic character, one who concerned himself about home affairs, looking after the cattle and the crops and the general home life. The mother preferred Jacob, and Isaac preferred the man of the open air, the son of the field, the hunter of the chase.

There is a distinct reason given why **Isaac loved Esau**, and that was, **Because he did eat of his venison**. The taste of the venison was always in his mouth. It excited and gratified his palate. The reason is not a deep one, nor a sufficient one, and perhaps it gives some insight into Isaac's character. Probably the man whose chief thought of his son was a sensuous thought may some day do his son an injustice. If children are loved because they are tall, stately, courageous, handsome, rich, such affection will fade away when the circumstances originating it have changed. He who loves wife, or child, or friend because of moral character finds his admiration upon an enduring base. This rule holds good respecting all fascination. Look not upon the outward appearance. "Man

looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Ver. 29. **Jacob sod pottage.** It was a woman's occupation. There was a feminine liteness and alertness about Jacob. Through this pottage Esau lost his birthright. Jacob was getting ready a pottage of lentiles, and the savour of it constituted a powerful appeal to Esau's hunger and weariness. The dish was steaming, the man was hungry. With unrestrained eagerness he appealed to his brother, but his brother was cool, collected, calculating, and seeing that his opportunity had come, he said, **Sell me this day thy birthright.** This was infamous. No matter what the after history may reveal, if we come along the historical line step by step, we must acknowledge that Jacob acted the part of a mean and selfish man. Never take advantage of another man's hunger. Never turn another man's poverty to your advantage. A family may have some heirloom, a child may have some remembrancer of the family, a widow may have some little gem, or picture reminding her of a happy long ago: do not bid for these things in the case of extreme hunger or weariness of mankind. He who obtains wealth under such circumstances robs God.

Ver. 32. **And Esau said, Behold I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?** Bad circumstances may account for bad reasoning. Men say, "We are in despair. Why not drink strong drink, and forget our misery?" Others say, "We cannot bear up long under this great pressure; why not rob our creditors, and thus provide for a rainy day?" Esau did not know that there were two deaths, one deadlier than the other; there is a death of the body, which is nothing; there is the death of the moral character, the conscience, of the trusts of life, and when these die the man is in very deed twice dead.

Ver. 33. **And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.** This is putting the transaction in terms that are too utterly feeble. This is not a case of commerce, it is a case of robbery. We may give so little or so much as to commit an act of felony in the process of completing what we call a good bargain. Bargain-making is always perilous. The devil often comes to us in that form. All trade is a temptation. We congratulate ourselves upon superior ability when we mislead or cheat our fellow men.

Ver. 34. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles ; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. There is absolutely no credit whatever due to Jacob. Did he not give the bread and pottage of lentiles? Yes ; but they were not his to give. He stole the very price which he paid for the birth-right. The transaction is thievish through and through. Observe how fearless the Bible is in delineating the character of its own heroes. It hides nothing, extenuates nothing ; with a strong hand it draws every line with unsparing breadth and clearness.

Thus Esau despised his birth-right. Yet, perhaps, regretted it in bitter silence. Judgment is one thing under the pressure of necessity, and quite another under the enjoyment of abundance. "Sin, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth death." We no sooner snatch a forbidden enjoyment than we die. It was so in Eden. It is an eternal law in human development. To gratify an unholy desire is to be plunged into darkness, is to burn with shame, is to have a foretaste of perdition. There is but a step between thee and death. "Touch not, taste not, handle not the unclean thing." Evil results will come out of this transaction. The mischief has but begun.

Is not Jacob an instance of those men who prematurely force their own destiny? Is not Jacob in this instance following the example of our mother Eve? Every man is sent into the world to carry out some divine purpose. We all stand within the bounds of a sovereign election. Let us not force our destiny, but calmly await its unfolding and issue. Sometimes fathers forestall the destiny of their children. They say they will make their children merchants, or ministers, or lawyers, or architects, or mariners. They should calmly wait upon God, that they may discover his holy will. The worst of it is that men will be meddling with the invisible and the supernatural. Men think they see when they do not see. They mistake darkness for a kind of light. Jacob was a man of special destiny. Through Jacob God had a great purpose to work out. Probably Jacob felt the mysterious pressure of destiny, and he was tempted to think that he had better have a hand in the development of his own fortunes. He went before the cloud moved. By night he did not tarry for the column of fire. It is always infinitely mischievous to look for short cuts to honour and supremacy. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, and he will give thee thy heart's desire." Awful will be the processes through which Jacob will be

chastened and purified. The iron will enter his soul, and he will walk through the furnace to the	honours which God has reserved for him. "The way of trans- gressors is hard."
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JACOB AT BETHEL.

GEN. xxviii. 10-22.

Henceforth Jacob becomes probably the most important person of the age within which he lived. Isaac had still sixty-three years of life to run out, yet Jacob takes precedence of him in all historical significance and importance. He is now undertaking a journey, of the results of which he had no conception. How easy to say that he **went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran!** Geographically that is all there is to say about the circumstance; but, religiously, who can forecast all the issue? In doing natural things we often come upon supernatural. What are called physical necessities are often turned into spiritual opportunities. When Jesus passed through Sychar, he was doing what was geographically necessary, but how great and vivid was the spiritual opportunity which occurred to him as he tarried by Jacob's well!

Jacob lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set. It was a mere matter of personal accommodation. Jacob's

view went no further. Little did Jacob think that in making his couch he was building a sanctuary. We lie down to sleep; the poet says, "to sleep, perchance to dream." We do the little outside work, and within our little lines God causes the shining of his light to arise. The hard pillow may not drive away the heavenly vision. Sometimes the hardships of life are the very medium through which God sends his most gracious communications. We go out of our dwelling-place not knowing what garden perfumes we shall bring back with us. We close the house door not knowing fully how great a separation we are making between the care that is outside and the rest that is within. Even weariness has its special visions of God. We may see more of God through our poverty and pain and loneliness than we could ever see of him through our abundance and popularity. We are told that Jewish commentators identify the place where Jacob slept with Mount Moriah. We are further told that the stone which Jacob placed under his head was one of

those which Abraham had set up as part of the altar upon which he was about to offer his son Isaac.

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. Isaac had given the birthright to Jacob, and this dream may be regarded as a confirmation of the transfer. Probably this is the first time that Jacob had been so conscious of the presence of the supernatural and the celestial. He sees a staircase rising from earth to heaven. The dream did not make the staircase; the staircase was always there, and is there now. The worlds are not unconnected. Jacob was himself at the foot of the staircase, and Jehovah stood and glowed in infinite splendour at its head. The staircase was much thronged, for angels were coming down, and angels were going up, and a great action of interest, solicitude, and communication was taking place. We know not by whom or by what we are surrounded. The angels watch the just. "Hereafter ye shall see the heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man." Even Heb. i. 14 does not alter the substantial meaning of the common reading. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for

them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Jesus Christ believed in angel ministry. Every little child has its angel before the Father in heaven. We cannot understand this confirmation of a birthright so appropriated, but as we have already seen the birthright will not come into Jacob's possession without that degree of punishment which shows that the universe is administering righteousness.

And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac. Here is a divine transfer of the land, and a divine promise as to the multiplication of the seed of Jacob. As in the case of Abram, the blessing was not for Jacob alone; it was for all the families of the earth. God does not pour the river of his blessing into a final reservoir; but it is as a stream rolling through all the lands, and blessing them with fertility.

In the fifteenth verse the promise becomes tenderer. **And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all the places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have**

spoken to thee of. The Old Testament is wonderful in tenderness. Is there anything in all the Bible more tender than Psalm xxiii., or than the 103rd Psalm, or many of the verses of the 40th chapter of Isaiah? Notice how throughout the Scriptures God associates himself with his people. This is notably the case in the Old Testament. [Read Judg. vi. 16; Isa. xliii. 2, 3; Jer. i. 19.] The class should commit to memory the 121st Psalm. God always associates himself with his people personally in a very direct and tender manner. [Read Josh. i. 5.] Great leaders have had to remind themselves of the divine promises that they might renew their courage in the face of great trials and crises. Call to mind the great speech of Joshua, "Ye know in all your hearts, and all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you: and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh. xxiii. 14).

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. This is a common human experience. If we had eyes to see, we should see God in every place. He is breathing in the winds, and he is shining in

all the lights of heaven. God's people have found him in unexpected places. Wherever God is, the place is holy. "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exod. iii. 5). Read a similar instruction in Josh v. 15. Reverence is essential to the true appreciation of all circumstances. Put no trust in the man who is deficient in veneration. Reverence accompanies dignity and elevation of thought. In order to be reverent we need not be superstitious. When we enter the house of God we should instinctively show every sign of dependence and obeisance.

And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. He found a church in the open air. The sky is the roof of God's great church. If we were more attentive we should hear more. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Every man has ears, but not necessarily ears to hear. There is a genius of attention. The fool hears nothing but noise; the wise man hears the going of the angels. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil."

When Jacob said that the place was dreadful, he was only expressing the sentiment of reverence; not dreadful in the sense of frightful or merely awful, but as full of sacred presences, and as calling for peculiarity of spirit and attitude.

And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. Thus the pillar was, first, part of the altar according to Jewish commentators; then it was a pillow for the head of the weary wanderer; and afterwards it became a sacred sign, and bore a sacred name, for Jacob **called the name of that place Bethel**, which means the house of God. The place **was called Luz at the first**. Bethel and Luz were distinct places, though close to one another. It may be taken that Jacob was naming the whole place, and not one particular spot. Probably the place where Jacob slept was not actually the town of Bethel; you might halt within a mile or two of the town. Blessed is he who builds houses of God along the way of his life. Every helpful event in life should call for the erection of a memorial stone, an Ebenezer. Never be ashamed to put up memorials of divine revelation or deliverance.

In building much be sure to build monuments to the memory of divine goodness.

And Jacob vowed a vow.

Yet in this very vow Jacob saw himself. It is in some senses a poor vow, yet it was the best that such a nature could breathe. This is a vow of calculation. If God would do certain things, Jacob would do certain things in return. He asks God to make a bid for his religion. In a sense he asks God to buy him. He says that if God will do such and such good things for him, the Lord shall be his God. This is evident on the face of our English translation. Jacob is here a mean man and a bargain-maker. We are told, however, that we are dealing with a false translation. The greatest scholars have assured us that Jacob in his vow implies no doubt; but, on the contrary, loyally and gratefully accepts God's own terms. The new translation, it is said, would run thus: "If Elohim will be with me, and will protect me on this journey that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and clothing to wear, and if I come again in peace to my father's house, and Jehovah will be my Elohim, then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall be Beth-Elohim; and of all that thou shall give me I will surely pay thee tithe." By Beth-Elohim Jacob probably meant

very much what we mean by a church. Coming back to that place loaded with blessings, he would not forget the vision which he had seen there.

In making vows let us be sure that we keep them. It is better not to vow than to vow and not to keep it. Men make vows, when

they are on sick-beds, that they will serve the Lord when restored. Men make vows in poverty that they will give God tithes when they are rich. Let us think for a little time about vows and broken vows, and see wherein we are guilty in this matter of breaking our word with the living God.

A BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS.

GEN. xviii. 17-21 ; GAL. iii. 7-14.

We are not to understand that Abraham or Jacob in his merely personal capacity was to be a blessing to all nations ; we are to understand that only in so far as they were the ancestors of Christ would universal blessings flow from their lives. A great argument may be founded upon the fact that universal blessings flowed from the life of Christ. It was because he was Emmanuel—"God with us"—that he touched all parts of human nature, and sent forth a river which carried life o'er all its winding and far-reaching course. Jesus Christ never contemplated less than universal empire. It was not enough for him to reign over one country, he must have dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers unto the ends of the earth. All the figures by which he is described in the Old Testament point him out as One who shall reign everywhere, over

all classes, tribes, conditions, and languages. Carefully read the 72nd Psalm, verse by verse. Probably there is no such music in any other part of the Divine Word. The psalm relates to Solomon only in the sense in which the early promises related to Abraham and Jacob. In view of the coming Christ, these were but so many typical names representing the glory and the fulness of the Christ age. In the 72nd Psalm we read words which could not apply to any mortal being in the full extent of their significance. Take, for example, verse 5 : "They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations." It is impossible that this could apply to any man, however great his majesty and vast his empire. Through human personalities God gives visions of the Sonship of Christ. His throne

is for ever and ever. "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." Christ is to "come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth." The universality of the reign of Christ is pointed out by the Evangelists. Thus we read in Luke ii. 14: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men"—not to one nation of men, or one corner of the world, but towards men universally and totally. Again: "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke i. 33).

We read that Jesus Christ is to have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. We are assured that they that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. We are further assured that all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him. Wonderful things are spoken of this universal reign in the book of the Revelation of John the Divine. "He is Lord of lords, and King of kings" (Rev. xvii. 14). "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and

he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xi. 15). "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." When we think of all these instances of personal majesty, we naturally wonder how they can be accounted for. Is this mere splendour? Is this a mere display of divine riches? Is God determining to dazzle the universe merely for the sake of showing how infinite is his own glory? Nothing of the kind. In this very psalm, the 72nd, we have the reason given for the majesty, the throne, the glory, and the power of Solomon's greater Son. Why shall Christ have all this dominion? This is the reason: "For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." His beneficence is his glory. It is because he is God, not merely because he is glorious, that he shall surely reign. "He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy." We are all willing that such a spirit should rule creation. Here is nothing of mere pomp or spectacular impulsiveness. Here is a spirit of care, solicitude, love, and benevolence.

"Power belongeth unto thee, and mercy." We should have trembled if we had known that power alone belonged to God. But when we learn that mercy is to share the dominion, we are content that omnipotence should

be in the hands of love. "He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence; and precious shall their blood be in his sight." Christ will lose nothing. Every drop of human blood is meaning to his appreciative eyes. The progress of Christ as the Saviour of all nations is represented by agricultural figures: "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." This is ministry of growth. There is no sign of violence in all this marvellous development. This is the ministry of silence, imperceptibleness, growth, and harvesting: "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest." Here again we have the ministry of aggression and violence. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be called forth, and the desert shall blossom as the rose." Still we are in the presence of growth and silence and obtrusiveness. Jesus himself says, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field."

Is there nothing of doctrinal significance and importance in the fact that Christ is to bless all nations?

First, it is evident that all

nations need him. We do not read in the Scriptures that some nations can do without him, and that other nations must receive him. The Scriptures deal with our fallen human nature. Their testimony is emphatic and universal: "There is none righteous, no not one." "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way." The universal disease requires a universal remedy.

When Jesus returned from the dead he said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." How was he going to use that power? The glorious answer is that he was going to use it beneficently, for he said, "Go ye therefore—that is to say, because I have all power you must go and do something." What was the something which the disciples had to do? It was to teach all nations. This is right use of power. When power is employed in education, it is put to its most beneficent use. When Jesus was with the disciples after the resurrection, he said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Then, secondly, every creature must need the Gospel, and the Gospel must be adapted to every creature. Pedantry can only speak to a few. The class can only speak to the class. But here is a religion which can be interpreted

to the universal intelligence and conscience of mankind. In Christ, repentance and remission of sins are to be preached among all nations.

Thirdly, the Gospel is the great uniting power which brings nations into concord and mutual trust. We shall never be one in politics, but we may be one in Christian sympathy. We shall never be one in any other identical sense in moral intellectual opinion, but we can be thoroughly and vitally one in moral purity and moral enthusiasm.

Fourthly, we have a great duty before us, and that is to send the Gospel out to all nations. But how can we send the Gospel to others until we have felt the power of it in our own hearts? Until we ourselves are converted, it is impossible that we can care deeply and lastingly for the conversion of others. See how in Jesus Christ Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are all summed up and glorified. When we know Jesus Christ we can go back upon the Old Testament Scriptures, and

read them in a larger and clearer light. After his resurrection Jesus expounded to his two disciples Moses and the prophets, and all the Scriptures. He found in them all references to himself. But for Christ, the Old Testament could not have been. He is truly the subject of the Old Testament as he is the subject of the New.

We may know that the Gospel is of divine origin by the simple fact that it can be preached to all nations. There is nothing in it which limits it to one district or one language. It touches the common human heart. It does not deal with frivolous subjects in which only a man here and there can be interested; it deals with sin, and redemption, and forgiveness, and destiny. These are universal subjects, and they can be translated into all languages. Of course every nation will receive the Gospel according to its own peculiarity. The Gospel which England receives, and the Gospel which India will receive, will be the same in substance, yet England and India will have its own way of representing the eternal.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

MARK xvi. 1-8.

Read in connection with this narrative Matt. xxviii. 1-8. The fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is proved again and again by the eleven instances in which he appeared to his disciples. All the passages ought to be carefully read: John xx. 14; Matt. xxviii. 9; Luke xxiv. 34; Luke xxiv. 13-35; Mark xxi. 14; John xx. 26; John xxi. 1-24; Matt. xxviii. 16; 1 Cor. xv. 6; 1 Cor. xv. 7; Luke xxv. 50.

Ver. 1 **When the Sabbath was past.** This might mean late on the Sabbath evening or night. According to Luke the Sabbath was so far over that it was "very early in the morning." Matthew describes the time "as it began to dawn." The order of facts has been thus put by an eminent commentator:—1. Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, the mother of James the Little, watched the burial just before the Sabbath began on the evening of the day of the crucifixion. 2. They stayed at home during the twenty-four hours of the Sabbath. 3. On the evening of that day they brought spices for the embalmment. 4. At earliest dawn, say about 4 a.m., they set out to make their way to the sepulchre, and they reached it when the sun had risen.

Ver. 3. **And they said among**

themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? This is what they were saying to themselves as they went on their way. Forgetful of all that Jesus Christ had told them respecting his rising again, the loving women took sweet spices that they might anoint the body of the Lord. To what useless ends we devote not a little of our anxiety and labour! Although Jesus Christ has promised to meet us, yet we take sweet spices to anoint his dead body! This is a case of love being in excess of faith. The women ought to have been going to a resurrection, but their faith was at so low an ebb that they went to a kind of second and superior burial. It is often the same with us in our needless defences of the faith. We go to defend Christ, and we find on reaching the field of battle that the victory has been won. Love should grow in the soil of faith. Devotion to the Lord is one of the noblest sentiments; but living faith in his living power is the highest tribute we can pay to his deity.

There is one great difficulty in the way. **Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?** These are the ques-

tions of human weakness. It is often in comparatively insignificant and outward things that our faith loses its activity. It is a misuse of the imagination to create difficulties. How true it is that many difficulties are greater in anticipation than in reality! When we look at the hill at a distance it appears to be very steep; but as we pass along in quest of the hill we often find ourselves at the top of it. Many people would have been afraid of the stone. They would have made it an excuse for remaining at home. People in our own time forbear to go to church because they think it is "going to rain." Who could have said anything against the reasoning of these women if they had said they were quite ready to go to the sepulchre, and even most anxious to do so, but it was utterly beyond their strength to roll away the stone? The reasoning would have been conclusive.

Ver. 4. **And when they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away.** That is exactly what we have to do. We have simply to look steadily at all intervening difficulties, and we shall find that they dissolve and disappear under the gaze of a determined and hopeful faith. The women were looking for a difficulty and they found a deliverance! God who can raise

the dead cannot be hindered by any stone which men can roll in his way.

Ver. 5. **They saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.** Matthew calls this young man an angel of the Lord. The air is full of personalities. Never think that the wind is empty simply because we have not vision acute enough to detect all its living contents. Always make the universe larger than it seems to be to the unassisted eye. The microscope can see in one drop of water what the naked eye can never discern. What the microscope is to the eye of the body, faith may be to the vision of the soul. A beautiful symbolism this, that it is a young man who is seated in the vacant sepulchre. There is no old age in heaven. We leave our old age in the tomb, and pass away into immortal youth. All the angels are youth. They may have accompanied with God through all eternity, yet in spirit, in thought, in strength, in all that makes life truly grand, they are young, they are children in the household of God.

Ver. 6. **And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted.** The angels come to strengthen hope. If they inspire fear it is not of a servile, but of a reverential kind.

The speech of the angel was equivalent to, "Be not shocked, distressed, disabled, but be strong, for I have good news to tell you." This was the first Gospel sermon; let us read it:—

Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. This was the speech delivered to women who had been overwhelmed by amazement. They were amazed by the supernatural presence, rather than triumphant because of the vacated tomb. We are often amazed at the wrong places. Observe how intimately acquainted the young angel was with historical Christianity. Was this one of the angels who sang the hymn at midnight over the plains of Bethlehem? Are the angels preachers of the everlasting Gospel in a sense and way unknown to us? Do the angels ever whisper to our hearts? Can we tell definitely the origin and source of all our inspirations and impulses? Whence do we get our most elevating and beneficent ideas? Now the angel starts the first missionary movement:—

Ver. 7. **But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.** I call this the first missionary band. This was

the first human sermon upon Jesus and the Resurrection. This sermon was preached by women. The women who had done so much for Jesus were honoured with being the first missionaries of the Resurrection. It is wonderful to note how God distributes the functions and the honours of the Church. All this happened in preconcerted order. Sometimes Peter had the first place; sometimes John; and now the women have it—and they were unspeakably worthy to be the heralds of the new Nativity. Angels sang the first song of Christ's coming, and women sang the second. I love to think of the Resurrection as the new Nativity.

But the women were disabled for a time by their joy of heart. In the eighth verse it is called **trembling, and amazement, and great fear.** All this, however, was the harbinger of joy. Sometimes the clouds conceal the stars; they do not destroy them. A beautiful picture of an inspired ministry we find in the gospels of these women. The minister must be overpowered by his message. He must, in the first instance, feel that it is too great a message to be delivered by human lips. When the amazement abates it will be replaced by joy and gratitude and unquenchable eloquence.

Ver. 9. **Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the**

week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. He had appeared to her before. Out of this Mary he had cast a seven-fold diabolic power. What if those who have had the deepest experiences of sin shall be the first to know the highest joys of grace! What an honour for this Mary! She, too, became a great preacher.

Ver. 10. She went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. Always base your preaching or teaching on your own experiences. When you attempt to tell a Gospel story, tell what has happened in your own heart and life. This was Paul's great method.

Now we begin the series of appearances which followed the Resurrection. Here is the first instance:—

Ver. 12. After that he appeared in another form, unto two of them, as they walked and went into the country. Henceforth the Resurrection became the great fact in Christian history. At first the Resurrection was a stumbling-block. Christianity is full of impossibilities to the natural reason. Yet it must be preached by people who have experienced its gracious power. At first, even Jesus himself was not discerned in the garden. [Read John xx, 14.] We do not discern Jesus now, though

he is round about us all the day long in little children, in poor lives, and in a thousand ministries of love. Look for Jesus, and you will find him on every side.

APPLICATION.

Many of us ought to take our stand beside Mary when she mourns the taking away of her Lord. He was taken away, but not destroyed. Few of us can see the divine hand far above all human meddling and strife. Without that hand human history is a piece of mischief, a gambling speculation, or a murderous fight; but when that hand is seen, the meaning of the whole action is changed. Many have given themselves up to unnecessary grief, there are tears for which there is no occasion. The angels wondered at the tears. What if they are wondering at all our unbelief and fear! The angels see the things that are hidden from us. In the dead seed they see the coming harvest. Back of the east wind is the kindly spring with all its buds and blossoms. Many can only recognise Christ under certain forms and in certain places. When Mary saw him in the garden, she did not know him. We must not get to know Christ in one form only. Into each century he may come in a new form. There are people who would rather have a dead Christ in their own sect and

ritual than a living Saviour outside their own approved boundaries. Many are talking about Christ as if he were absent. "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." It is quite right to speak of a historical Christ; but the statement must be completed by the

realisation of a Christ near at hand. At the very moment Mary was complaining the Lord himself was looking at her and listening to her. Look for Christ everywhere. In the church, in the garden, in childhood, in the place of graves, in the opening and ever-shining heavens.

CHRIST'S TESTIMONY TO JOHN.

LUKE vii. 24-35.

The parallel account is in Matt. xi. 7-14. The two accounts are nearly identical, and should be read together. John had sent his disciples (Luke says there were two of them sent) to inquire whether Jesus was the Messiah who should come, or whether another was to be looked for. Jesus Christ did not in the first instance give an answer in words. In Luke he performs the miracles, and sends an account of them as his answer to John. In Matthew we read, "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." This is Christ's greatest answer to all inquiries. This should be the answer of the Church to all quibblers and controversialists. Our

answer is not in words which are variable and ambiguous, but in deeds of love and helpfulness, which speak all languages and carry conviction to all unprejudiced minds. The works of the Church are the best arguments of the Church.

There is a beautiful picture in ver. 24. It is the picture of Jesus Christ defending the honour and good faith of an absent friend. The people who heard the questions put by the messengers of John might think that John's faith was giving way, and might see in its collapse a foretoken of the extinction of Christ's claim to be the Messiah. Jesus Christ first healed the bruised and rallying faith of his forerunner, and then he began to vindicate that forerunner in the hearing of all the people.

It is to be understood that John was in prison; he had been in

prison all the winter, he had heard the revel of the not distant court, and as the weary months dragged themselves over his life he began to wonder. The devil always takes advantage of us at our lowest point. He gets a man into a wilderness, and tries to sap his faith; he then drags him into a prison, and tries to extinguish his hope. There is a good deal in environment; there is a subtle mystery about atmospheric influences; there are points in space at which we can receive no temptation, and there are other points where we seem to be delivered over to the very power of the enemy.

John had actually pointed out Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Now he had been month after month in prison, and was apparently forsaken of the very God whom he had exalted, and the very Saviour whom he had pointed out with exultant delight. What wonder if John began to be faint-hearted! What should we have done under the same circumstances? Some have suggested that the doubt was in the disciples of John rather than in John himself. I cannot accept that reading of the case, because Christ's answer was sent to John, and not addressed to the disciples themselves.

Observe that John sent directly

to Christ himself. He might have sent to the Scribes and Pharisees, or he might have discussed the question with such disciples as were about him. Men will not go to Christ himself and talk out their doubts, suspicions, and wonders, as it were, face to face with him. What we have to do in all cases of spiritual doubt and depression is to go to God himself as he is revealed in the Scriptures. We are not even to go to commentators, or to preachers, but to go in prayer to the living Lord himself. Go immediately to Christ as he is delineated in the four gospels; do not dimly and vaguely refer to portions, parts, and aspects of those gospels, but have them in your very heart as a living word, and, so to say, as part of the very substance of your soul.

What John did, the Church must also do. The Church cannot live in its books of mere divinity. The Church can make no impression upon the age so long as it indulges in verbal controversy. What is the Church doing? Are lepers being cleansed, are the blind receiving their sight, are the dumb learning to speak? All the miracles, when taken in their high and ultimate sense, can be done, and are being done every day. We narrow Christ's meaning, and indeed we dishonour it, when we imagine that to open the eyes of the blind is a merely

physical operation, or to cleanse the leper a ministry that begins and ends in the flesh. The miracles of Jesus Christ were introductory and suggestive. When the leprous flesh was healed, the true meaning was that Jesus Christ wished to cleanse the leprosy of the soul. The bad man is a leper; the man who is in intellectual error is blind; the man whose mouth is open to utter forbidden words is practically the dumb man, whose lips must be opened to speak the music of the truth of God. When the Church works these miracles, she need not defend her written credentials, or speak much about her ancestry and her literature. Her answer is not in the library only, it is on the public thoroughfares, it is in the homes, the lives, and the various business of men.

Jesus Christ interrogates the multitude concerning John. In these questionings Christ points out the troubled course through which every real prophet must pass if he would attain permanent supremacy of influence. These inquiries put by the Master himself are a wonderful forecast of the action of the Church in all ages.

What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? That is the first impression which every

true worker makes upon the popular mind. He is supposed to be a nine days' wonder. The people say the man will soon work himself out, and no more will be heard of him than of an exploded bubble in the air. The next stage in the process of development is indicated in these words (ver. 25): **But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?** When the prophet does not expire like a nine days' wonder,* the people turn round and say he is feathering his nest, looking well after himself, laying up for a rainy day. They do not immediately rise to the point of honest appreciation. Judging others by themselves, they suppose that all good services are of the nature of selfish investment. Jesus Christ rebukes this notion so far as John was concerned by reminding the people that **they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts.** John was in prison, therefore the mean suspicion of self-interested piety could not attach to him. If he had been a courtier, people might have said that this was the end of all his piety; but he was a sufferer in the dark prison, and, therefore, could not be accused of successful self-seeking. The third and final stage of public criticism is indicated in these words: **But what went ye out for to see? A prophet?** Baffled in all previous instances,

they are obliged, in the long run, to confess that John is a prophet. It is right to try the spirits, whether they be of God, but it is never right to encounter good men, or men who are trying to do a good work, with mean and mischievous suspicion. We are not required to receive every good worker with indiscriminate applause and commendation; but we are required to give every man a fair field and no favour, that he may show exactly and thoroughly his real quality. Jesus Christ gave a great confirmation to the prophetic qualification of his forerunner: **Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.** Jesus Christ thus confirms Old Testament prophecy. He never hesitated to quote from Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms, things concerning himself. In this instance, He quotes from the very last book in what we call our Old Testament. He found himself everywhere in the ancient Scriptures. Here we may remark that it is surely enough for us, as humble and imperfectly instructed followers of Christ, to use the Bible exactly as Jesus himself used it. We all know that there are mysteries in the volume of inspiration, and we are quite content that competent and reve-

rential criticism should lend us all the aid in its power; but we have before us the living example of Christ himself in his use of the Old Testament, and for my part I would rather be guided by that use than by a criticism which is at present self-conflicting, and which honestly confesses that it is still engaged in research and adjustment. He cannot be wrong who can justify his practice by the example of the Saviour himself.

Let us learn from this development of criticism in relation to John not to be rash or severe in our criticism of the men whom God may raise up to carry on his work in the world. They may be but carpenters, and sons of carpenters; they may be but fishermen and tentmakers; yet God chooses his own instruments, and he will vindicate his election.

Jesus Christ sends a special message to John (ver. 23). **And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.** In other words, "Blessed is he who shall not be scandalised in me." Jesus Christ was placed under the same criticism that had been inflicted upon John. "Is not this the carpenter's son? Whence then hath this man all these things? They were offended in him." God has been constantly working the miracle of bringing the lowest to the highest position. This would really seem to be a

constant quantity in the evolution of divine providence. "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" (Matt. xxi. 42). "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." [Read Acts iv. 11; Ps. cxviii. 22; Rom. ix. 33; 1 Cor. i. 23; 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8.] So John became the very greatest man before the institution of the kingdom of God in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. **Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he** (ver. 28). It was predicted of John that he should be great in the sight of the Lord. [Read Luke i. 14, 15.] A great character of the Baptist is given in John v. 35. Here, then, is a great opportunity for the least of us to excel in glory the splendour of the greatest of the prophets. Our excellence must be found in our vitality. There is a peculiar quality of life derived from union with Christ. It is in that quality of life that the least is greater than the greatest outside the Christ-life. Think of the greatest marble statue ever created by artistic hands. Let it be high,

and lifted up into the blue air. Let every line of it be so true and exquisite as to elicit the commendation of a Phidias or an Angelo. It is indeed very majestic and truly beautiful, yet the least and poorest child is of infinitely more worth than the proudest statuary. Make a beautiful flower of wax. Let it be so exquisitely fashioned that the most fastidious, criticism cannot find fault with it, yet the humblest daisy in all the meadows is greater in its significance, in its poetry, and in all its suggestiveness, than the most elaborate work in artificial flower-making. All things should be determined by the higher standard. The soul is more than meat, and the body than raiment. The tenant is of greater consequence than the house. The hand is more valuable than the jewellery which blazes on it. It is even so in the higher life. God hath chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith. There is a wealth that is poverty; and there is a poverty that is wealth. If we judge all men and all things by the standard which Christ has set up we shall judge righteous judgment.

Jesus Christ heard the public opinion that was expressed concerning John, both favourable and unfavourable, and, having heard it, he delivered the address (vers. 31-35). He showed that it was

impossible to please people who were filled with prejudice. They said John had a devil because **he came neither eating nor drinking**; and they said that the Son of man was a **gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners** because he was not marked by social austerity. What was Christ's great answer to social prejudice? That answer is given in ver. 35. We must await the

end of all things. Do not interrupt the process of divine education, but allow it to go on to its final issue, and then it will be seen who is right and who is wrong. Judge nothing before the time. He that would save his life shall lose it, and he that would lose his life for Christ's sake shall find it. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

CHRIST TEACHING BY PARABLES.

LUKE viii. 4-15.

Here we have Jesus Christ face to face with a great multitude. We have already seen that Jesus Christ could address a great multitude effectively because he was himself a multitudinous man. We have dwelt with special appreciation upon the fact that Jesus Christ was not an expert in one direction only; by "expert" I mean a man who has devoted his attention to one particular line of inquiry and action, such as an oculist, an aurist, or a nerve-doctor; Jesus Christ knew every man because he was himself every man in one. This is the true meaning of his title, "the Son of man." He represented all genealogies, all necessities, all aspirations, and all possibilities. Now he was face to face with a great multitude.

Jesus Christ's method of teaching was varied. Sometimes it was a long and connected discourse, such as we find in the Sermon on the Mount. And in the case before us we read that "he spake ~~many~~ things unto them in parables." Luke says **he spake by a parable**. A crowd is often caught by points rather than by sustained and elaborate arguments. Pictorial teaching is always popular. Take an audience of two thousand persons: whilst some of them may be delighted with a subtle argument in metaphysics, one thousand nine hundred and ninety of them would infinitely prefer pictures, parables, illustrations, and the like. This is natural. We live in a world of pictures. Jesus Christ saw those pictures and pointed

them out, attaching to each a deep moral significance; as, for example, when he saw the fowls of the air, the lilies of the field, the foxes in their holes, the fields white unto harvest, and the well at Sychar, Jesus Christ passed from the pictorial to the spiritual, from the outward to the inward, from things earthly to things heavenly. We are always still intellectual children, and we need the inducements which children need to excite our interest and fascinate our attention.

Speaking generally of the parabolical teaching of Jesus Christ—for that is really the subject of our lesson, though our attention is mainly called to one particular parable—we may say that these marvellous parables are the picture-gallery of the Church. The parable shows what is usually called “the ideal side of the kingdom.” This is the painter’s art. The painter is not a copyist, or a literalist; he does not transfer a tree to his paper or his canvas; he puts meanings into his work which grow upon the mind, and hold it in new fascinations evermore. The amateur daubs flat paint upon flat canvas, and the canvas is but the heavier for the lifeless load. The true painter makes the paint throb, and fills the canvas with the electricity which burns in his own hand.

We never get all the meaning

of the parables; but we never get all the meaning of any truth. The parables bear inspection for ever; they have revelations suited to the morning light and to the noontide glory and to the mystery of the solemn gloaming. To all the ages of the fathers they have been uttering their music, yet their music comes to-day with swells of power and cadences of persuasive pathos which our fathers never heard. Do not suppose that you have read all the parables, and have gone through them. The parables sent from heaven are always new, fresh, dewy, original, vital.

“Never man spake like this Man.” He never uttered the same word twice in the same tone. This is not to be explained in words; such genius has no explanation in the dictionary; it is *felt*, and the heart, glowing with wordless delight, grips and loves the tender meaning.

These words are to be taken as introductory to a study of the wondrous parables of Jesus Christ. In the parable immediately before us, we have a great advantage over many others, for we have not only the parable, we have Jesus Christ’s own explanation of it. Jesus gives both the text and the sermon. We have the same thing put from the inside and from the outside. It is possible that a right explanation

of this particular parable may serve as a key in the unlocking of many other parables. Notice how all the parables firmly base themselves on great human facts and social analogies, and consequently how true they are to all that is known to be true amongst ourselves. These parables are all great human truths lifted up into heavenly lights, and bearing upon them interpretations of divine things.

This parable of the sower, or parable of the kingdom of heaven, is true of all kingdoms that are themselves true. The marvellous fact connected with the kingdom of heaven is this, that it takes up all other kingdoms into itself, and shows that, in so far as they are true, they do but illustrate on incomplete lines what that kingdom itself would be upon the whole lines of universal thinking and acting. Do not get into the notion of imagining that religion is something separate from life. Fight that awful and deadly superstition. Religion is the last expression of all that is best and dearest in our own consciousness, experience, and aspiration, "like as a father," "like as a shepherd," "like as a nurse," "like as a mother." By such analogies does the kingdom of heaven shine forth its tenderest glowing and meaning upon the eyes that want to see the gracious revelation.

This parable of the sower and

the seed belongs to every kingdom that is true. It belongs to the kingdom of knowledge or ordinary education. No man ever yet went forth to teach mankind letters, philosophy, science, morals, but came home a living exemplification of this very parable. Any man who has been interested in the education of the people from great vices, in the enlightenment and general progress of society, will give in his report almost in the words of this parable. Read your Bibles in the light of this suggestion, and a new light will shine upon the old Book. Read in the right way, the Bible expresses the experience of the world in the language of heaven. The classification which Jesus Christ here makes is true to fact in every age of human history. The men of this parable are the men of to-day, and the men of every day. In all ages we have those who hear the Word and do not understand it; those who joyfully receive the Word, and having no root in themselves, endure only for a little while; those who hear the Word, but are over-mastered by the world and by the deceitfulness of riches; those also who hear the Word, and grow in great plentifulness of precious fruit. A lecturer upon science would give in just the same report; so would a teacher of manufacturing industries; so would a teacher in any school of learning.

What is true of the kingdom and what is true of human society as represented in this parable, is true of the results which are here indicated. The results can be tested in every section of the human family. A proof is not to be found in the Church only, it is to be found in all our families. The family is one, the teaching is one, the care taken of all the children is the same—none is esteemed above another; the same patience and love and anxiety and solicitude are expended upon all. Now look at the different results. One of the sons seems to have had no instruction at all: another child has received all the instruction and forgotten every word of it; another has received the instruction and has attended to it, and has become wise. This is the parable over again. This is the one report; it was delivered eighteen hundred years ago from the ship. It has been read in all the missionary halls in Christendom, year after year ever since, and the last report that will be read in those halls will be this parable in modern language. The tone, the music, will be the same, the figures only will be changed; there will be no change in the inner and vital substance, until, indeed, the time shall come when the whole world shall be a harvest-field ready for the sickle of the angels.

Now what is true of all other

circles of human education is true in churches and in Sunday-schools. The sermons are the same, and the lessons are the same and the prayers are the same; yet what is the report of the whole? If I had to give an account of my own ministry in church and school, I could not improve on the language of this parable, **Some fell by the wayside . . . some fell upon a rock . . . some fell among thorns . . . and some fell on good ground.** This fact dissipates the foolish theory that men respond to their environments; that if men had more advantages they would all be better; that if all men went to school, all men would be instructed and wise. Nothing of the kind. Everything depends upon what we ourselves are; faithfulness and perseverance will secure results which are denied to unfaithfulness and indolence. The Bible itself is not the same book to every man. One man profits by the sermon or lesson, and to another man it is nothing; yet the fault may not be either in the sermon or the lesson, but simply in the man himself; he may be worldly, careless, absorbed in other subjects, and forgetful. Let us lay the blame in the right quarter.

Jesus Christ himself, having finished his parable, said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." All men have ears, but

not necessarily ears to hear. Our very faculties may be rendered useless, so that having eyes we see not, and having ears we hear not, and having hearts we do not understand.

It is intensely interesting to watch these people coming to Jesus Christ in quest of an explanation of the striking parable. They began by asking why he spoke to them in parables, and not in the common and direct way in which men speak of material things. The disciples regarded the parable as a veiled truth, or a way of setting forth a truth that was designed only for a certain class of minds. Jesus Christ gave them the reason: **And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom, of God; but to others in parables.** This, of course, is an infinite mystery, and is not to be explained in words. The facts of life are, however, just as mysterious as this statement. To one man is given the gift of poetry, and to another man it is not given. To one man is given the mystery of music, and it is impossible for him to pass it on even to his own child, if that child is not entrusted from Heaven itself with the holy power. To one man is given the gift of eloquence, whilst the lips of another are sealed in silence.

To one man is given the gift of appreciation, so that he sees and hears "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." To another man all things are alike, and nothing awakens peculiar exultancy, or elicits specific applause. We cannot understand these things, but we can receive them as mysteries, and find in them new reasons for patiently waiting until it please God to give us light. The Apostle Paul recognised this great doctrine of sovereignty in the distribution of gifts. [Read 1 Cor. ii. x.] The Apostle John lays down the great law of spiritual knowledge; that law he finds in the greater law of spiritual obedience (John vii. 17). The most extraordinary revelations have been given to the most unlikely persons. Who would have suspected Peter, the rough, rude fisherman, to be one of the main instruments through whom the Christ would be revealed to the world? Yet that he was so is clear from Matt. xvi. 17.

Let it be understood that in all this discrimination of personality, and all this irregularity and apparently capricious distribution of talent, there is nothing withheld from the simplest mind that is essential to salvation. The things that are reserved for special persons and conditions are not things which relate to the growth of pure

and beneficent character. There is a common bread to which all have access. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." It is true that the Lord has a secret, but it is with them that fear him, and to them will he show his covenant.

Looking at all these varieties of results, it becomes a very solemn question to see, how we ourselves intend to receive the kingdom of God. If we please we can receive it on hard ground, or in thorny

places, or in a good and honest heart. Let us pray that we may receive it in the last way. If we would know how true is the commandment of God we must first obey it. In all the higher education, obedience is the first condition of progress. If we are not docile we never can learn. If we put our own will, or our own prejudices, between us and God, then we simply exclude the light and keep God himself at a distance. Now that this year is closing around us, and the shadows are thickening, it is a time for reflection, for looking back, and for making vows, deep solemn and elevating.

THE TWELVE SENT FORTH.

MATT. x. 5-16.

We should connect this chapter with the conclusion of the ninth. [Read chap ix. 36-38]. From these words we might conclude that the duty of the Church is simply to pray that God would call out and send forth ministers or reapers. There is undoubtedly an infinite truth in this statement. The question is whether there is not beyond this particular construction an application that is of a very special and instructive kind. Immediately after calling upon the disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into his harvest, Jesus Christ

"called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them power." We should connect the last verse of the previous chapter with the first of our lesson to-day. Then the text will read, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. **These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them.**" The great lesson is that where men are praying that God would send forth ministers or reapers, they themselves may discover that in praying that others may be sent they have been preparing themselves to go. When

a man prays that God would send forth a missionary, he may possibly forget that he himself may be the very missionary for whose services he has been praying. If we pray with our whole heart for any object we shall be disposed by the very exercise to discover the means of realising our own prayers. The answer often lies nearer the prayer than we suppose. When the suppliant says "Amen" to his own prayer, he may be as much speaking to himself as he is speaking to God. If "Amen" means "So be it," or "So let it be," the man must be commanding his own heart to do the very things for which the heart has been praying. This is a great mystery, but it is God's way of conducting the soul's highest desires and satisfying the loftiest aspirations of the spirit.

In this instance Jesus Christ is not choosing the disciples,—that had already been done [see Luke vi. 13]; he is sending them forth to do a special and timely work. "Disciple" means "scholar" or "pupil." "Apostle" signifies "one who is sent," and it involves the idea that the man who is sent has come from the very face of the sender. The word "apostle" came to acquire the meaning of "ambassador" or "envoy." Perhaps the word is used partially in this sense by our Lord, for he does not hesitate to say that

the apostles were sent by him, as he himself had been sent by the Father. The very name, "ambassador" or "envoy," implies authority, power to speak on behalf of the state that is represented. At the same time no ambassador would undertake to settle questions which had not been settled by the supreme power of the state. In all such cases he would refer to the supreme power for instructions as to procedure. It is even so with apostles to-day. As ministers and teachers we are not to invent our own credentials, or enlarge our own functions, or go a-warfare at our own charges; in all things our position must be limited and strengthened by the divine testimony itself. We must search the Scriptures daily to test the teaching even of apostles and high ambassadors.

Jesus Christ gives his disciples power (ver. 1). What is the kind of power which Jesus Christ gives to his chosen ones? We must understand that the very fact of their being chosen implies the quality of their character. Never forget that character underlies and governs all other qualifications. Where the character is not good, the service cannot be right. The very fact, then, that Jesus Christ called these men and sent them forth on their mission is a clear proof that he was satisfied as to their moral qualifications. The

choice of Judas Iscariot is no exception to this rule. We cannot tell what uses that man had to serve in the ministry. We know not whether in the very spirit of him he was really so bad a man as he is represented in history. Circumstances are required for the development of character. From the very first there was a subtle and inexplicable purpose in the choice of Judas, so we must not make his position in the apostolate a reason for supporting and commending wicked men.

Observing that the power Jesus gave to the disciples was a beneficent power. It was a power "against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease." It was, therefore, power to do good. It was a constructive and not a destructive power. Whatever power we have is meant to be used for the good of others. If you can work miracles, heal the sick; if you have the power of speech, open your mouth for the dumb; if you have wealth, let your compassion flow out to those who are in need. Jesus Christ never gives any man power merely for the sake of giving it; it is not a personal possession or a personal luxury; it is meant for expenditure, for spreading over the largest possible surface, and for accomplishing the largest possible usefulness. Observe that

there are varieties of power, but that all power is given from Heaven only. Power is therefore only another word for "responsibility." The measure of power is the measure of obligation. Jesus Christ always used his own power beneficially. When he said all power was given to him in heaven and on earth, he instantly added, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." The largest and best use of power is application. Judge every man's power not by his intellectual splendour, or personal ambition, but by the amount of good he is doing to other men.

Now we have to be present at a great speech made by Jesus Christ when he commanded his disciples. Realise the vivid and beautiful picture of the whole scene. Jesus Christ does not divide his authority even with the eldest of the disciples. A marvellous fact it is that Jesus Christ never lowers or modifies his tone of sovereignty. He does not propose a consultation, nor does he inquire as to the preferences of the disciples, nor does he suggest that some spheres will suit the health of the disciples better than others; nothing of the kind. He "commands," he "sends forth," and he positively outlines both the sphere and the duty of those whom he sends. The apostles, on their side, take up a position of obedience. They do not assert

their equality, nor do they complain that they have not been consulted, nor do they venture upon a series of suggestions; they simply do their duty by responding in a spirit of absolute and all-trusting obedience.

In the first instance, the twelve were not to go **into the way of the Gentiles, nor into any city of the Samaritans**; they were to **Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**. This is in harmony with the whole method of the divine education of the world. God himself must begin at some particular point, and it pleased him to begin at the point of the Jews. He is not only continuing history, he is confirming it. The sovereignty that we discover in Jewish history we also discern in Christian missions. This prohibition as to the Gentiles was, of course, only temporary. [Read Acts xiii. 46.] But when the disciples went to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, they went, not with a little and narrow message, but with a great, broad function towards humanity. The local sphere was limited, but there is no element of limitation in the work which the disciples had to perform. As they were going upon their business what had they to do? Even in the act of going upon it they had to do the very work which was its end and purpose.

Ver. 7. **And as ye go**—do something on the road; every moment is a responsibility; every man is an opportunity; every necessity gives you a chance of vindicating your apostleship—**preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils**. Notice that all this is human and not Jewish work. Very carefully consider that in the act of limiting Jesus Christ is actually enlarging the sphere of the Apostles.

A great doctrine is laid down in ver. 8: **Freely ye have received, freely give**. "Freely" does not mean liberally or abundantly; it means without price; it means without any return having been made by those who received the gift; it is indeed a miracle of grace—a supreme and significant privilege. Understand that this rule applies to missions, whether at home or abroad. It does not imply what is called an unpaid ministry, for that sophism is exploded again and again by Christ and his Apostles. When men go out to the heathen, to outcasts, to the halt, and blind, and miserable, and penniless, the question of money should never enter into their calculations. No one expects a fee for saving a drowning man. No man wants to be paid before he will pluck a child out of the fire. Just in proportion as we

have freely received—that is to say, just in proportion as we realise the grace of God in our own hearts—are we willing to communicate it to the lives of others. The Spirit of Christ is the very spirit of beneficence. On the other hand, no man can receive these great gifts of grace without in his turn wishing to do something for those who delivered them from heaven. There is a reciprocal action constantly at work. The converted heart, the new life, gives continually of itself to others, and those others in their turn being converted and renewed, continue the same process until we hold all things in common, and no man says that aught that he has is his own. We must not adapt a narrow and foolish interpretation to these words; they simply mean in their highest application that we hold our power on behalf of the weak, our eloquence on behalf of the speechless, our money on behalf of the poor; we are trustees, we are God's servants.

Jesus Christ did not forbid the disciples to take money with them when he said, **Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass.** He simply meant that if they had the money already, they might take it with them, but they were not to "provide" it—to go about seeking it, to make a point of not starting until they had acquired it. The money idea was not to enter into

their arrangements or calculations at all.

Jesus Christ is a man who undertakes a great work upon conditions which cannot be disappointed. He wants only meat, and there is something in human nature that will not let the earnest man starve. **The workman is worthy of his meat.** The earnest man may rely upon it that, go where he may, he shall have bread enough and to spare. I am not now speaking about particular moments or hours of crying necessity, but I say that taking the ministry of the Word in its length and breadth, in the issue we shall find that God has not disappointed his servants. If Jesus Christ had set up a missionary scheme, with most intricate and complex and expensive mechanism, it would have come to nothing; but its conditions are so simple, so heroic, so grand, and so perfectly exemplified in his own person, that they apply to all times, lands, climes, and social conditions, unto all national and world-wide necessities. In sending these men forth to their work, Jesus Christ shows perfect knowledge of the field they are about to enter. He does not paint a very fascinating picture. No appeal is made here to imagination, to æsthetics, to the artistic sense, to the social instinct; everything is about as terrible as it can

be. I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.

"Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death; and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake,"—now go! That is your duty and that is your fate! Behind all these warnings there is a great principle, and if we miss that principle we miss the whole purpose of the mission of the Apostles. The principle is that before conquest there must be war; before gain there must be loss; before joy there must be sorrow. It was needful that the faith and the enthusiasm of these men should be severely tested. They are no carpet-knights who have to carry on the war of Christ. Our principles and convictions and doctrines must all be stretched on the rack of experience. In this respect consider what a sublime history Christianity has. Every tittle of it has been sealed with blood; every proposition has been tested as by fire. The Apostles were sent forth to convert mankind. The lot of the true evangelist is a hard lot. Goodness is always hateful to evil. Goodness can never

establish itself anywhere without a battle. You cannot take upon you a new habit without having to fight for every inch of ground you make; you cannot exert yourself to throw off slothfulness or any self-indulgence without having to fight. One would have thought that in sending forth Goodness the angel would have been recognised at once and welcomed with warm and generous hospitality. All history gives an answer to the contrary. People say, "Show a beautiful example, a beautiful God, a beautiful Gospel, and there will be an answer of devotion and homage in every human heart." That has been proved to be false. The example is not enough; men are not saved by exhibitions; we need something higher than a spectacular gospel. Men get used to beauty, and theirs is a familiarity which is followed by contempt. There are men who care nothing for the sunrise; there are men who could gabble in a sunset; there are men who could chaffer and joke upon the great sea. Never suppose, therefore, that men are not converted because Christ is not preached. Surely Christ could preach his own Gospel, and yet from many a city he had to turn sorrowfully away.

Here is a great lesson for the Church. In proportion as the Church becomes luxurious will

the Church become feeble. In proportion as the Church says to the world, Let us compromise this business, and say nothing unpleasant to one another, but sit down and enjoy ourselves as far as we can, the Church has proved itself to be unworthy of the confidence and esteem of men; the Church has broken the trust and vow paid before God. Persecution and difficulty will always do the Church good. And why is there no persecution? Is it because there is no holiness? Is it not still true, and for ever true, that they who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution?

Jesus Christ told his disciples how to treat the cities and towns that rejected the message they had to convey to them. **Whoso-**

ever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. They mistake Christ who suppose that he is soft, indifferent, easily imposed upon, and can be treated contemptuously without feeling it. No man has the right to reject truth. He has the power to do it, but not the right. We have liberty to go to perdition, but not the right. You have no right to refuse a just idea; you have no right to shut yourself up in solitude, and exclude yourself from the ministries of civilisation. We cannot, therefore, say, Surely the houses and cities had a perfect right to reject the Evangelists if they chose to do so. No, they had no such right. No man has a right to exclude the sun from his garden or his home.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

ISAIAH ix. 2-7.

The people that walked in darkness. For contrast, read chap. viii. 21, 22. The words are quoted in the Gospel of Matthew, as you will see by turning to chap. iv. 16. It is worth notice that Jesus Christ was of Nazareth, and that Nazareth was in the tribe of Zebulun, spoken of in the first verse of this chapter.

Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy. The Revised Version strikes out the word "not." The meaning is: Thou hast increased its joy. Here was to be an increase of population beyond everything that had been known (Isa. xxvi. 15; J. r. xxxi. 27; Ezek. xxxvi. 11). Amidst all this abounding light,

and joy, and continual increase, the word "not" in the third verse is unquestionably out of place.

They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest. It was, then, a religious festival. The joy was, so to say, offered before the Lord, presented to him in sacrifice, an oblation of the grateful and rejoicing heart. The joy of harvest represents the ultimate aspects of success; all the tumult is brought to peace, all the toil is brought to plenteousness. We are taught to offer the sacrifices of joy. The joy is not mere hilarity as of excited animal spirits; it has deep religious significations, and it is only perfect when it can be offered to the Lord (Phil. iii. 1; Rom. xiv. 17). Conquerors have joy on a victorious battle-field; such a field is in another sense a field of harvest.

For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden. The people had been under task-masters; they had been crushed to the earth by the weight of their burdens; the iron had entered into their souls; now the time of deliverance has dawned.

For every battle of the warrior. Ellicott has retranslated the whole of the verse: "Every boot of the warrior that tramps noisily, and the cloak rolled in blood, are for burning."

The memorials of war are destroyed. The very footprints of the devil are erased from the earth, and the refuse has been made use of in assisting the growth of an abundant harvest.

The divine movement amongst the nations has always expressed itself under the contrast of light and darkness (ver. 2). "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." [Read Isa. lx. 1-3.] There is a very beautiful picture in Luke i. 78, 79, "Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." [Read John i. 4, 5, 9; also John viii. 12.] The heavenly city is pictured as one in which there is no need for the light of the sun (Rev. xxi. 23, 24). God has chosen the contrast of light and darkness as representing the difference between his kingdom and all other kingdoms. The divine movement is always associated with light. What is light? Only those who have been long in darkness know what the morning is. It may not be much to those who go to rest healthily, and pass through a dreamless sleep; but what is it to those who have been tossing in pain and weariness the whole night

long? Could a man, who has been ten years blind, receive his sight, he would go almost mad with grateful joy as he beheld the light; for the light is everywhere; it is in the flower, it is in the air, it is in every human face; it is the mystery that works itself into the whole economy and relation of being; it is the secret of most things, it is the interpreter of all: God is the light. Only renewed men know what sin is. Whilst we are in the sin we do not know it; we have wrought ourselves into a shameful familiarity with it, so that even sin, which ought to be the miracle of all time, becomes the commonplace of history. Let a man once see what sin really is, and escape from it by the grace of God, and he will tell you what he has passed through in language that will appear to be an exaggeration to men who have not had similar experience. Only those who have been the servants of evil can read such a book as Bunyan's "Grace Abounding," and can understand many of the ancient Scriptural writers. The elder brother could not understand the feasting, the music, and the dancing; he had always been at home; his monotony was broken in upon. Here was a miracle of joy, and he was not in the atmosphere. He had no vital relation to all the process; to him it was noise, tumult, folly, an act of gross misconception on

the part of all concerned. The prodigal understood it all; now he listened to the music with new attention; now he joined in the dance, not as in the revel of debauchery, but as in a religious exercise; the music might be the same, the whirl of the dance might be unchanged. It is the spirit that transforms and elevates all the actions of life. Did we really know the meaning of this blessing of spiritual light we should be touched into music, as in the ancient fable the rising sun made the stones sing and quiver as with joy. Isaiah feels that all this is coming upon the earth, he says in effect, this is the kingdom—who is the king? The fulfilment of the divine purpose has ever been associated with incarnation, idealised humanity. There has always been some coming One. Sometimes we have almost seen him upon the historic page—"A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you"—and instantly imagination is fired, and the whole sphere of human sensibility is excited to a new sensitiveness, as if the prophet might be coming to-day. Who is this king-priest looming in the distance, bearded, solemn-eyed, calm, majestic? Ask him his name, and he answers "Melchizedek." There is an outline of a figure in the dark night, and it is of a figure in conflict. Ask the name of the wrestling angel,

and he will not give it, but he will change the name of Jacob into Israel. As Christian readers of the prophecies, we have no difficulty in connecting these great predictions of the universal light with the name of him who called himself the Light of the world.

Ver. 3 and 4 are full of harvest, and victory, and joy. In the time of perfect peace, when the people of God have no more battle to wage, shall be fulfilled the sacred declaration, "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity." All the belfries of time ring and clang with bell-music as they announce the joy of the Lord, the gathering of his harvest, and the universal acceptance of his sovereignty. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Ver. 5 is most graphic and overwhelming. God himself sets fire to all the emblems and instruments of war. He comes forth in all the majesty of his strength to plant and to reap the harvest of peace. No warrior can stand before him. No evil or cruel policy of inferior kings can prevail against the counsel of the Lord

(Acts ii. 19; Isa. lxiii. 1-3; Rev. xix. 13; Isa. lvi. 15, 16).

Now we come to one of the most wonderful verses in Holy Writ: **For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.**

It is not necessary to suppose that the prophet knew the literal meaning of his own words. He might only be acquainted with some of their intermediate applications. He is but a poor preacher who knows all that he has said in his sermon. Had Isaiah understood all, he would no longer be the contemporary of his own epoch. He would have outrun the centuries and separated himself by an infinite distance from the very people whom he meant to cheer. The astronomers have forecast the existence of an unseen planet. The botanists have been assured that because of the presence of one plant in a locality, the presence of another plant would surely be discovered within a given radius of that centre. So with the larger astronomy, and the larger botany: the prophets knew that there was a Morning Star that would outshine all the

other stellar glories; and they knew that somewhere, not far off, there was a plant of varied name, but of use always for healing, called the Balm of Gilead, or the Rose of Sharon, or the Lily of the Valley. It is the glory of the prophet to see signs which have infinite meanings; to see the harvest in the seed, the noonday in the faintest tint of dawn, the mighty man in the helpless infant, the far ascending spire in the first line of its foundation. This prevision made the prophets seemingly mad. Their knowledge was to them but a prison, so small, so dark, yet now and again almost alive with a glory all but revealed. The horizon was loaded with gloom, yet here and there a rent showed that heaven was immediately behind, and might at any moment make the dark, cold earth bright and warm with eternal summer. This hope has kept the world alive; this hope has kept off the languor and decrepitude of old age; this hope has shaken the prison-walls of the present, and filled the far-off prospect with the image of good men, mighty to labour, and gracious to lead the world.

The government shall be upon his shoulder. The names that are given here would seem to be only one. Some of the names can be hyphenated and partly consolidated, thus, Wonderful-

Counsellor may be connected as one word; then God-the-Mighty-One, not four separate words, but four notes in one grand bar of music; then Father-of-Eternity; and lastly Prince-of-Peace. It is not at all necessary to think that Isaiah saw the birth of Christ in prophecy as we see it in history. The prophetic vision is one faculty, the historic representation is a distinct branch of criticism. What Isaiah did see was that the only deliverer who could accomplish the necessary work must fill out the whole measure of these terms; if he failed to fill out that outline, he was not the predicted Messiah. Whoever the Coming One was, in the fulness of his personality, he must first of all fill the imagination; hence he comes before the prophet's view as "Wonderful." Imagination cannot be safely left out of any religion; it is that wondrous faculty that flies to great heights, and is not afraid of infinite breadths; the faculty, so to say, that lies at the back of all other faculties, sums them up, and then adds an element of its own. Is this name "Wonderful" given here for the first time? Where do we find the word "Wonderful" in the Scriptures? We may not, perhaps, find it in the English tongue, but it is really to be found in Judges xiii. 18: "The angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Why askest thou thus after my name,

seeing it is secret?" The angel might have said, "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is Wonderful?" Let us say, again and again, there has always been a spectral presence in history, a ghost, an anonymous ministry; something that comes and goes in flashes of light, in frowns of darkness, in whispered blessings, in dreams that make the night glow above the brightness of a summer day.

The surrounding nations, Egypt and Assyria, gave great names to their gods. One Assyrian king was called "The great king, the king unrivalled, the noble warrior." But Isaiah threw all other appellations into contempt. He describes the Coming One as "The Mighty God." The word is not *Elohim*, it is *El*, a word which is never applied but to Jehovah, and which is never used but in relation to the innermost essence of ineffable Deity.

The pledge of the fulfilment of all is, **The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.** "Zeal" is the root out of which we have the word jealousy. The Lord is jealous over the daughter of Zion. The Lord has undertaken to set up a kingdom of his own, and to bring all the world under the sunshine of his love; and because it is his work he will surely bring it to pass. Our hearts go out towards all the heathen world praying for missionaries and their households, for all evangelists and teachers, and for all the people who have seen the glory and felt the light of the coming kingdom of Christ. The work may take a long time, but it will be done with infinite completeness. I wish that all our teachers and scholars would unite in this prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

POSTSCRIPT.

IN closing this series of volumes I have to announce the approaching completion of my greatest literary effort, THE PULPIT BIBLE. I am not aware that any similar attempt has ever been made. The notes are all marginal, so that there is no increase in the mere bulk of the ordinary Pulpit Bible. At the end there will be a detailed Index, which will show at a glance where the reader can find more pulpit matter by the same author. THE PULPIT BIBLE will of course be in one volume only. The publishers themselves will finally determine the price, my personal hope being that it will not exceed a guinea and a half net. The type will be large and noble; the binding will be strong and useful; the notes are meant to be suggestive. Messrs. Funk & Wagnalls Company in America and Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton in England will publish this PULPIT BIBLE of mine probably in the early autumn of 1901. I cannot too highly appreciate the spirit in which they are courageously co-operating.

JOSEPH PARKER.

THE CITY TEMPLE,
October, 1900.

INDEX OF TEXTS FOR THE SIX VOLUMES.

OLD TESTAMENT.

GENESIS—				DEUTERONOMY (<i>cont.</i>)—			
	PAGE		VOL.		PAGE		VOL.
iii. 1-15 ...	156	...	VI.	ii. 9 ...	170	...	IV.
iv. 3-13 ...	159	...	VI.	ii. 36 ...	183	...	I.
ix. 8-17 ...	164	...	VI.	iii. 25 ...	189	...	III.
xii. 1-9 ...	167	...	VI.	iii. 29 ...	48	...	VI.
xv. 5 ...	75	...	V.	vi. 23 ...	3	...	II.
xvii. 1-9 ...	172	...	VI.	vii. 2 ...	209	...	III.
xviii. 8 ...	169	...	I.	vii. 9 ...	211	...	III.
xviii. 17-21 ...	194	...	VI.	vii. 17 ...	211	...	III.
xviii. 22-33 ...	176	...	VI.	JOSHUA—			
xxii. 2 ...	188	...	IV.	iv. 23 ...	58	...	VI.
xxii. 1-13 ...	181	...	VI.	xxii. 16 ...	67	...	VI.
xxv. 27-34 ...	186	...	VI.	JUDGES—			
xxviii. 10-22 ...	190	...	VI.	xi. 7 ...	37	...	III.
xxviii. 16 ...	177	...	III.	1 SAMUEL—			
xxviii. 18 ...	181	...	III.	ii. 18 ...	34	...	IV.
xlix. 29, 31 ...	176	...	IV.	vii. 15 ...	187	...	III.
Exodus—				2 SAMUEL—			
i. 6 ...	178	...	IV.	vi. 5 ...	58	...	III.
xii. 31 ...	89	...	VI.	xiv. 14 ...	83	...	II.
xvi. 21 ...	177	...	III.	xix. 34 ...	175	...	I.
xxxiv. 6 ...	167	...	IV.	1 KINGS—			
Leviticus—				xix. 4 ...	179	...	I.
xx. 26 ...	184	...	I.	2 KINGS—			
Numbers—				iii. 17 ...	171	...	I.
xi. 14 ...	195	...	III.	iv. 42-44 ...	160	...	III.
xiv. 27 ...	95	...	IV.	v. i. ...	174	...	IV.
xxxii. 38 ...	113	...	III.	vi. 17 ...	148	...	V.
xxxii. 38 ...	164	...	V.	1 CHRONICLES—			
Deuteronomy—				ii. 34 ...	138	...	I.
i. 8 ...	186	...	III.	iv. 22 ...	159	...	I.
i. 28 ...	194	...	II.	x. 6. ...	178	...	IV.
i. 39 ...	191	...	I.	xix. 3 ...	179	...	IV.
i. 40 ...	212	...	III.	xxiii. 28 ...	83	...	IV.
ii. 5 ...	170	...	IV.				

226 INDEX OF TEXTS FOR THE SIX VOLUMES.

2 CHRONICLES—				CANTICLES—			
ii. 5	...	...	144 ... III.	ii. 4	...	...	197 ... III.
NEHEMIAH—				ISAIAH—			
i. 4, 5	...	...	48 ... I.	i. 18	...	...	I ... V.
vii. 2	...	...	63 ... IV.	i. 30	...	...	172 ... I.
xiii. 26	...	...	107 ... I.	ix. 6	...	...	171 ... IV.
JOB—				ix. 2-7	...	...	218 ... VI.
i. 14	...	...	124 ... II.	xxxv. 10	...	...	191 ... I.
vii. 18	...	...	178 ... III.	xxxv. 10	...	...	78 ... III.
xi. 8	...	...	100 ... II.	xxxviii. 3	...	...	155 ... III.
xxvii. 10	...	...	135 ... IV.	xxxviii. 17	...	...	161 ... III.
PSALMS—				xl. 16	...	...	147 ... III.
vi. 3	...	...	149 ... III.	xliv. 7	...	...	147 ... I.
vii. 10	...	...	26 ... I.	liii. 1	...	...	165 ... V.
viii. 3	...	...	180 ... III.	lv. 8	...	...	198 ... III.
xiii. 6	...	...	170 ... III.	lxiii. 3	...	...	26 ... VI.
xix. 2	...	...	196 ... III.	JEREMIAH—			
xxiii. 1	...	...	183 ... IV.	iv. 3	...	...	181 ... I.
xxxi. 5	...	...	11 ... IV.	vi. 2	...	...	187 ... I.
xxxiii. 5	...	...	157 ... III.	viii. 20	...	...	149 ... V.
xl. 10	...	...	127 ... I.	xviii. 14	...	...	18 ... I.
lv. 19	...	...	118 ... I.	xxxi. 18	...	...	179 ... V.
lx. 9	...	...	168 ... V.	l. 20	...	...	161 ... III.
lxxi. i.	...	...	180 ... V.	EZEKIEL—			
lxxxvii. 3	...	...	151 ... V.	x. 5	...	...	155 ... III.
xcii. 1	...	...	203 ... III.	xii.	...	...	167 ... V.
xcii. 4	...	...	193 ... III.	xviii. 25	...	...	165 ... I.
xciv. 19	...	...	192 ... III.	xxxvii. 1-10	...	...	52 ... II.
xcv. 5	...	...	204 ... III.	xxxviii. 10	...	...	157 ... V.
ciii. 11	...	...	161 ... III.	xl. 20	...	...	105 ... IV.
ciii. 12	...	...	161 ... III.	AMOS—			
ciii. 17	...	...	161 ... III.	iv. 4	...	...	194 ... III.
cviii. 2	...	...	191 ... III.	MICAH—			
cxix. 143	...	...	194 ... III.	vi. 14, 15	...	...	190 ... IV.
cxxv. 2	...	...	206 ... III.	HABAKKUK—			
cxxx. 1	...	...	72 ... II.	iii. 19	...	...	68 ... III.
cxxxvi. 1	...	...	199 ... III.	HAGGAI—			
cxxxvi. 1	...	...	169 ... V.	ii. 10-23	...	...	86 ... III.
cxxxix. 18	...	...	188 ... III.	ii. 19	...	...	142 ... III.
cxlvii. 2-6	...	...	79 ... VI.	ZECHARIAH—			
PROVERBS—				viii. 17	...	...	159 ... I.
x. 23	...	...	177 ... I.	xiv. 7	...	...	161 ... V.
ECCLESIASTES—							
i. 14	...	...	159 ... V.				

NEW TESTAMENT.

MATTHEW—		PAGE	VOL.	LUKE (cont.)—		PAGE	VOL.
ii. 1	...	3	IV.	xiv. 14	...	118	V.
ii. 1	...	182	V.	xvi. 25	...	156	IV.
ii. 2	...	37	I.	xxiii. 12	...	111	II.
iii. 11	...	183	V.	xxiv. 21	...	24	II.
iii. 14	...	133	III.	xxiv. 27	...	171	I.
iv. 17	...	161	I.	xxiv. 29	...	57	I.
vi. 27	...	96	V.	xxiv. 37	...	20	IV.
vii. 21	...	34	V.	JOHN—			
viii. 26	...	159	III.	i. 17	...	184	III.
x. 5-16	...	212	VI.	i. 48	...	173	III.
xi. 28	...	128	VI.	iii. 14	...	181	III.
xiii. 32	...	185	I.	iv. 13	...	154	V.
xiii. 52	...	162	I.	v. 13, 15	...	176	I.
xiii. 52	...	115	IV.	v. 17	...	156	V.
xvi. 13	...	145	III.	xiv. 2	...	86	V.
xxi. 2, 3	...	174	V.	xvi. 32	...	180	III.
xxi. 4-5	...	176	V.	xxi. 3	...	190	III.
xxi. 8, 9	...	177	V.	xxi. 4	...	191	III.
xxi. 12, 13	...	178	V.	ACTS—			
xxii. 21	...	152	I.	i. 3	...	155	I.
xxiii. 37	...	3	VI.	ii. 15	...	152	V.
xxv. 14	...	184	II.	iv. 11	...	183	III.
xxv. 15	...	186	II.	viii. 3	...	165	I.
xxv. 16, 17	...	188	II.	ix. 1	...	165	I.
xxv. 18	...	189	II.	xiii. 38	...	63	V.
xxv. 19	...	190	II.	xiv. 19	...	165	I.
xxvi. 73	...	15	II.	xvi. 23	...	165	I.
MARK—				xvii. 25	...	173	IV.
iv. 26-29	...	181	IV.	xviii. 28	...	90	II.
iv. 39	...	185	IV.	xx. 22	...	62	II.
vi. 39	...	158	V.	xxi. 25	...	157	I.
vii. 24	...	141	III.	xxiii. 12	...	165	I.
viii. 12	...	50	V.	xxv. 19	...	96	I.
ix. 19	...	206	III.	xxvi. 10	...	165	I.
ix. 50	...	122	III.	xxvii. 29	...	184	IV.
x. 6	...	84	I.	xxviii. 2	...	178	I.
x. 19	...	146	IV.	ROMANS—			
xii. 32	...	17	V.	i. 1	...	186	I.
xv. 35	...	152	III.	i. 1	...	207	III.
xvi. 1-8	...	198	VI.	i. 20	...	150	III.
LUKE—				ii. 14	...	151	III.
v. 26	...	68	I.	vi. 14	...	163	V.
vii. 24-35	...	202	VI.	vii. 7	...	172	V.
viii. 4-15	...	207	VI.	vii. 7	...	185	V.
ix. 21	...	168	IV.	viii. 3	...	171	V.
ix. 51-56	...	47	III.	viii. 38	...	149	I.
xii. 15	...	151	I.				

ROMANS (<i>cont.</i>)—				PAGE	VOL.
xiv. 16	...	...	...	41	II.
xiv. 19	...	...	...	148	I.
xvi. 1, 2	...	...	...	53	IV.
1 CORINTHIANS—					
i. 13	...	...	...	143	III.
ii. 2	...	...	...	76	I.
ii. 14	...	...	...	169	I.
iii. 18	...	...	...	40	II.
iv. 5	...	...	...	173	I.
xi. 28	...	...	...	40	II.
2 CORINTHIANS—					
ii. 14	...	...	...	169	IV.
xi. 23	...	...	...	165	I.
GALATIANS—					
i. 13	...	...	...	165	I.
ii. 21	...	...	...	98	III.
iii. 7-14	...	...	...	194	VI.
iv. 9	...	...	...	166	IV.
vi. 4	...	...	...	40	II.
vi. 7	...	...	...	165	I.
vi. 7	...	...	...	205	III.
EPHESIANS—					
i. 16	...	...	...	I	I.
i. 19	...	...	...	125	IV.
ii. 1	...	...	...	113	VI.
ii. 7	...	...	...	125	IV.
PHILIPPIANS—					
i. ...	...	...	...	135	II.
i. 21	...	...	...	187	IV.
ii. I-II	...	...	...	148	II.
ii. 3	...	...	...	39	II.
ii. 5	...	...	...	37	II.
PHILIPPIANS (<i>cont.</i>)—				PAGE	VOL.
iii. ...	...	...	...	158	II.
iii. 13	...	...	...	208	III.
iv. ...	...	...	...	163	II.
iv. 11	...	...	...	169	II.
COLOSSIANS—					
iii. 2	...	...	...	150	I.
iii. 15	...	...	...	38	II.
iii. 16	...	...	...	39	II.
2 THESSALONIANS—					
iii. 18	...	...	...	148	III.
HEBREWS—					
i. 14	...	...	...	147	V.
ii. 11	...	...	...	146	III.
iv. 1	...	...	...	109	V.
vi. 9	...	...	...	156	I.
viii. 1	...	...	...	150	V.
x. 25	...	...	...	181	II.
xi. 16	...	...	...	146	III.
xii. 27	...	...	...	156	I.
1 PETER—					
i. 20	...	...	...	154	III.
1 JOHN—					
iii. 2	...	...	...	200	III.
iv. 16	...	...	...	167	I.
3 JOHN—					
...	...	...	...	163	III.
REVELATION—					
iii. 4	...	...	...	153	I.
xv. 3	...	...	...	185	III.
xxi. 5	...	...	...	151	III.

